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NAVAL ROMANCES

THE CHILD OF THE WRECK

OR

THE STOLEN BRACELETS

GLASGOW & LONDON : CAMERON & FERGUSON

THE MIDNIGHT STORM.

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THE

CHILD OF THE WRECK;

OR,

THE STOLEN BRACELETS.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUTH OF ENGLAND.

GLASGOW AND LONDON:
CAMERON & FERGUSON.

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THE CHILD OF THE WRECK;

OR

THE STOLEN BRACELETS.

A ROMANCE OF THE SOUTH OF ENGLAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE MIDNIGHT STORM—A WRECK

"The sky is dark—but the gallant bark
Is bounding away over the wave!
The lightnings flash, and the billows dash,
As she goes to her watery grave."

The European traveller who has made the homeward passage from the Mediterranean, through the Straits of Gibraltar, and thence across the Bay of Biscay to the English Channel, will not very readily forget the booming wind which so often rushes over those long seas, for days together, ere he comes fairly in sight of the rock-ribbed coast which skirts the southern border of England. These heavy gusts come sweeping down through the narrow outlet of the Straits of Dover, too, and following on, glance across the towering castle-rocks, shooting over into the broad seas beyond with powerful and destructive force. Fearful indeed is the result at certain seasons, in that region, to the labouring ship which is forced to encounter this passage amid one of the lengthened and tedious storms which so frequently occur there.

It was late in the season, and near the midnight watch, when the hull and spars of a tall merchantman suddenly hove in sight off Lizard Point. No signal was in view, and she dashed on amid the swift-running currents beyond the Point, coming swiftly down before the increasing easterly gale, under close-reefed topsails, after a long stress of weather, as if now in search of some place of shelter from the noisy and contending elements. The night was oppressively dark and heavy, the wind roared on, and the scene was relieved or disturbed only by an occasional flash of lightning or the muttering of loud peals of thunder.

"An ugly time we have, captain," ventured a tall, gentlemanly personage to the commander of the ship, as the couple stood upon the poop-deck of the noble craft, peering out into the thick blackness for a glimpse of some beacon of hope.

"It is the hardest night we shall see," responded the captain, as he turned his eyes toward the compass in the binnacle.

A sharp wind-gust suddenly struck over the larboard quarter, the canvas flapped heavily against the topmasts, and the anxious captain jumped upon the quarter dock, as he placed his trumpet to his lips.

"Bear a hand, Mr Trimmer. Call all hands!"

"All hands on deck!" shouted the mate, looking aloft at the fluttering sails, and—

"All hands!" echoed from mouth to mouth, as the watch upon deck sprang hastily into the rigging.

"About ship!" roared the commander.

"Helm hard down," added the first officer.

"Hard down!" responded the helmsman, and the noble vessel for an instant came up to her work, true as the needle to the magnet. But the elements were sporting with her, and as she quarter-headed upon the other tack, another flaw struck her on the lee bow, threw up her head, and she missed stays.

The order was hastily repeated to "wear ship," but it was found impossible to effect it; and for fifteen minutes she dashed onward at a fearful rate before the gale.

"Breakers ahead!" suddenly shouted the look-out from the fore-top.

"Where away?" asked the captain.

"—— weather bow," was all that could be heard, in the confusion which followed this announcement.

"Breakers! breakers—close aboard!" shrieked a dozen voices at once.

But the noble captain rallied his frightened crew, and urged them to their duty. It was a moment of life or death.

"All hands," yelled the mate again, "wear ship!"

"Up with the helm!"

"Hard up," was the response.

"Stand by, at the clew garnets."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Brace up the head-yards."

"Hold sharp—belay." But the ship would not answer.

"She heads hard on, sir," said the mate, approaching the commander. But the keen eye of the experienced sailor had already discovered the peril.

"Bear a hand, men!" once more he shouted. "Let go the clew-lines." And in another moment the topsails were in ribbons, shivered in the raving wind.

"Steady now, boys, steady. Lower away the life-boats!" roared the commander, as he perceived his crew running in every direction.

"Is there *no* hope?" anxiously inquired the gentleman we have already spoken of.

"We are lost!" replied the second officer. And as another flash of lightning darted forth from the murky clouds, the cabin-way had been unfastened, and a score of passengers crowded out upon the deck of the doomed ship.

All was confusion, terror, dismay. The hardy crew hastily grasped the handiest of their "traps," and rushed to the leeward side of the rolling craft; the passengers sunk upon their knees to utter a last supplication to Him who holds the waters in the hollow of his hand; the stouter hearted seized upon the rigging for support—and the affrighted women yielded in despair, as the heavy sea broached against the side of the ill-fated vessel.

"The boats can't live in that swell," remarked the chief mate, as preparations were completed to lower away, in forlorn hope.

"The ship must go ashore," continued the commander. Nothing but the boats can save—"

Even as he spoke, an enormous sea pitched over her, and more than a fourth of the crew and passengers were scattered far and wide in the troubled surge!

The gallant skipper shook the salt spray from his grey locks, and vouchsafed one shout of encouragement to those who were left behind; but another long wave followed close upon the first, the merchantman rose high in the air, she rolled forward, the breakers curled and foamed within a few yards of her noble prow, and an instant afterward, the ship crashed dead on to a pointed reef, less than a mile from the main shore. Every man was pitched off his legs by the terrible shock, and the vessel stuck as if she had been bolted to her rocky bed. The sea continued to make a clean breach over her, and the tall foremast at the moment of the strike went lazily by the board.

At this trying crisis, flames were suddenly seen bursting from the after cabin. For a few moments the sea had lulled comparatively, but terror had fastened upon the crew and passengers, whose hopes for escape were every moment growing fainter, when a few spare spars were hastily thrown together at the ship's side, and the perilled sufferers attempted thus to leave the burning wreck. The gallant captain stood upon the tafferel, giving orders up to the last moment, and though the flames hissed about him, he still encouraged his dismayed companions, as they crowded over the ship's stern, in the vain hope of finding escape upon the frail raft so hurriedly prepared.

The storm increased again; the wind howled and the sea rose rapidly. A wave dashed in towards the burning wreck, the raft parted from the side of the vessel, and a score or more of souls, a moment after, were tossing abroad on the tops of the augmenting billows, upon the raft, separated from death only by a few frail timbers so hastily and insecurely put together, that but a little time had elapsed ere their last hope was shivered, and they were engulphed almost *en masse!*

The roaring of the breakers and the shrieks of the few remaining women and passengers on board, were sufficient to stir the stoutest heart, but the moment for *action* had now arrived. The mainmast had been cut away, and went over the side with a crash—but all was futile; another sea broke over her, partially extinguishing the flames, and the ship parted. The long-boat had been stove, the counter was smashed, and all further hope of leaving the ship was cut off, as the wretched men looked abroad at the boiling surge. It was nearing morn, but still an inky blackness pervaded the frightful scene. The captain had previously contrived to fire a gun or two, and the signal of distress had been heard on the shore. Already half a dozen wreckers had appeared, and their lanterns flitted about from point to point upon the rocks, but they were clouded from view in the mist, and could render no aid to the sufferers. The tide was rapidly coming in, and higher rose the storm wind, fiercer blew the gale!

Their number had decreased as each succeeding wave swept over the

wreck, and as a faint glimmer of daylight dawned a ray of hope for a brief moment cheered the fainting hearts of the few who yet clung to the broken fragments of the ship; but the sea augmented, and the vessel began to roll and heave again in the increasing depth of water. As the foam-crested billows rushed inward a huge wave raised the broken hulk, threw her forward upon her beam-ends, the cross-planks parted, and the rude elements had well nigh completed their work of death.

The youthful mother, the wife of the person who had first spoken with the captain but a moment previously, had sprang to her husband's side, who now supported her and himself by clinging to the rigging. She had lashed her infant boy to a portion of the tafferel, which she now seized upon in the last moments of her despair, but as the wreck parted she was dashed over the stern of the ship with half-a-dozen fellow-passengers, few of whom ever rose from out the turbulent flood, not one of whom remained to tell of the disaster. And still the rushing wind continued to lash the waters into fury, a dreadful darkness covered the scene, save when the red lightning coursed down the sides of the huge black clouds, crinkling in the far distance like a fiery serpent, and the labouring wreck still heaved and tossed, until of all that crew there remained but the wretched father and his boy, and the hard-featured skipper. Morning broke slowly at last, but, with the exception of the high stern of the ship, nothing remained to be seen of the vessel or freight but a few boxes, which floated far away to leeward, and which were anxiously being watched by the avaricious and sharp-sighted wreckers on shore.

The tide reached its height, and turned to ebb. A receding wave lifted the fragment-wreck from the rock; it parted once more; the skipper, who had secured himself to it, rolled over into the stormy abyss, the parent was washed outward, and the broad tafferel, on which the boy had been fastened, slid over the rock towards the shore. The wind forced the latter through the circling eddies, where, after whirling about for a little time, it was discovered by the wreckers, whose eyes glistened as they beheld the richly-gilded carved work which ornamented its stanchions, and the foremost of whom suddenly descried the boy fastened to its top.

The surf-boat was instantly launched, and almost as instantly swamped. At length a stouter heart than the rest volunteered to venture out with a line, and Ben Darling was soon forcing his way through the rolling surge, with a strong rope fastened to his waist. He reached the floating fragment with its precious burthen, and was soon drawn safely to the shore, amid the loud cheers and encouragements of his rough comrades. And daylight increased, the sea still rolled, a heavy mist covered land and water; but no token of the proud ship remained. The wreck was total!

The wreckers, who had been watching for any property which might be washed ashore upon the changing of the tide, secured their boat upon a sort of truck adapted to the purpose, and left the beach empty-handed. The contents of the boxes proved to be of no account, and the foremost of the gang had already disappeared. A few stragglers—

women and children who inhabited the huts immediately adjacent to the sea-shore—lingered about the vicinity of the scene, but nothing of value appearing in sight from the wreck, the place was soon deserted.

That portion of the deck to which still clung the wretched father, floated away from the reef with the receding tide, and he saw the brave captain sink at his side. He gazed after the tafferel as it separated from him, and dashed over the rocks. The splinters flew, and it tossed away from his straining sight like an egg-shell upon the boisterous sea. He watched it as it receded from his sight, it disappeared, it sunk away in the mist, and his heart drooped within him, as he felt that this tender tie had been broken, too, and believed that his wife and child were lost to him for ever! But still he floated on.

As morning brightened, he stretched his aching sight and endeavoured to penetrate the thick mist which surrounded him, in the hopes of discovering land near him. But, far as he could see, nothing cheered him; all was one sheet of rolling, foaming sea, far away to leeward. The wind changed about finally, and he at length found himself out in the open sea, upon a few frail timbers, nearly chilled to death, without the remotest sign for hope or succour.

Thus he drifted on for several hours, when the mist suddenly began to disappear, the clouds lightened, and the sun at last broke forth in all its warmth and splendour. The wind had lulled, but the sea still rolled very heavily, however, and the sufferer supposed it to be some two hours after noon. He continued to keep a watchful look-out, straining his gaze in search of some vessel which might fortunately be in the vicinity, when he suddenly descried, far away in the distance, a small dark spot rising occasionally against the horizon, which soon grew into a sail, and almost rendered him frantic with joy and expectation. If he could be fortunate enough to make a signal which would attract the notice of the craft—for he saw plainly that it was a large vessel bound upward, and apparently but a short distance beyond him—how happy would be his rescue. An hour passed—an age, in that brief hour, too—when the strange sail had approached within almost speaking distance.

The sufferer raised himself up as prominently as possible, and removing his outer garment, he waved it over his head, and shouted at the top of his lungs—"Bark, ahoy! Ahoy—*ahoy!*" He believed he could see the moving men upon the deck, but the sound died away, and the vessel headed off a point upon her course! The madness, the misery of that moment cannot be told! Again he shouted, again he waved his garment, and as he gazed after the craft, he saw that she wavered, the helm was put hard a port, she rounded to, and he noticed her tacking in a direction straight towards him.

O, how his heart bounded with joy, and how fervently did he offer thanks to Him who succours the helpless, as he watched the movements of the friendly bark and anticipated his deliverance. The remnant of the floating wreck had been discovered on board the vessel, and the stranger's motions had been finally caught sight of, just as it had been determined to pass the object—none dreaming before that a human being was there. As they were leaving it, the signal was descried.

CHAPTER II.

THE HOMEWARD BOUND BARK.

"The storm has fled,
The wind was dead,
Bright came the red dawn o'er the deep!"

WHILE he gazed upon the stranger sail, the jolly boat had been lowered, and half a dozen stout oarsmen struck out lustily in the direction of the drifting object. The perilled man continued to made his signal, the bark bore up slowly, off and on, and the boat approached the sufferer. On the way from the bark, the sailors rescued the dead body of a young female, which was lashed to a piece of the wreck, and which had also been borne out to sea by the receding tide. The bow oarsman held the lifeless form of the unknown woman in his arms, and the traveller, in his anxiety to reach the boat, suddenly found himself thrown into the trough of the sea. The piece of wreck to which he had clung, rose and fell in the distance upon the waves, and his peril for a moment was desperate. The boat came alongside, however, an oar was reached out, he seized it, and was saved. The wild sea-gulls shrieked about overhead, the boiling waves still heaved and threatened to engulph the frail boat, but she headed towards the vessel, and the sailors struck out manfully, after securing the wayfarer who had been so very fortunately discovered.

"Halloo, shipmate—where from?" said one of the sailors, in a bluff but hearty manner, as the boat hove round towards the stranger, who lost no time in getting aboard.

"My eyes, master! don't *eat* us," continued the rough but good-tempered sailors, as the man, half crazy with excitement, embraced them over and over again, and reflected on his miraculous escape, alone, as he believed, of all the number who deemed themselves so secure in their stanch and noble craft but the day before.

They were soon at the side of the noble bark—he mounted to the gangway, and fell upon the deck exhausted with fatigue and excitement.

"What wreck is it?" asked the captain of the vessel, half an hour afterwards, as he entertained the stranger in his commodious cabin.

"It was the good ship Hesper, of Bristol, homeward bound," replied his guest.

"And you took the blow last night?"

"Yes, just off a ledge, but a few miles, I judge, from this, to the northward."

"The 'Coral Reef.' I know it well," rejoined the captain.

"It was a terrible night, captain."

"It was the worst nor'easter I have seen for many a long day. And the crew you said were lost?"

"The wreck was *total*, captain. Out of more than forty souls, not one beside myself is left to tell the melancholy tale."

"And the passengers, too?"

"All, captain, all. I beheld my wife and infant boy sink before my eyes, while I was utterly powerless to aid them. The mother was engulphed in the boiling waves at my side, the infant was buried as I gazed upon his pallid features, but for neither had I the means to afford the slightest assistance, so violent was the raging of the storm."

"Dreadful!"

"The master of the ship was the last being I saw. He was lashed to a piece of the vessel with myself, and as the ruins rose and fell upon the sharp crags, he rolled into the sea, the infant had just preceded him, and a gust of wind bore me swiftly away from the trying scene. I have thus lingered and tossed about in fearful agony since morning, when Providence threw me in your path, and again I have to thank you for your friendly kindness."

"Don't mention that, my dear sir," said the captain. "I am happy in the opportunity to serve you, and for your terrible bereavement I offer you the sympathy of a rough but honest heart. You are welcome to the bark—welcome, sir."

Tears filled the young husband's eyes, tears of heartfelt gratitude for his safety; tears of bitter sorrow for the loss of his loved wife and little one. But he was now safe on board the Meteor, Captain Harmon, from the Mediterranean, bound to Liverpool; and though the passage home was brief, it was a tedious one to the unhappy parent, who had seen his family thus snatched from him at the moment almost when he had reached his native shores again, after a long protracted absence. The bark sped briskly on her course, and finally arrived in safety at the port of her destination. The generous captain stoutly refused to receive a penny in compensation from his passenger, who, after taking a friendly leave of the skipper, and scattering some gold (which he obtained readily in Liverpool upon his draft) among the crew, lost no time in making his way to London, and thence to Bristol; where he announced his fortunate escape himself, and brought the sad intelligence to her owners and the friends of the passengers, of the loss of the ill-starred Hesper and crew!

The kind-hearted Ben Darling was known far and wide in his vicinity for his benevolence and upright character. He occupied a small but well-tilled farm half a mile above the inner shore, near the reef where the shipwreck had occurred, and followed the business of farmer and husbandman over a small vineyard, which was attached to his little estate. When occasion called, he was never behind his neighbours to do a good turn for his fellow-men, and on the night of the disaster, he had been the first to notice the report of the signal gun from the Hesper. He gathered a few companions together at once, and hurried with them to the shore, to render such aid as might be in his power.

On their arrival there, no object was in sight; the high projecting rocks and thick mist shutting the awful scene entirely from view, in the thick darkness. They were satisfied, however, that a vessel was in danger upon the outside of the reef, and occasionally they heard, or

imagined they heard, the shrieking or shouting of the sufferers; but not until morning broke did they discover anything which gave them assurance of their fears. A few floating boxes were driven shoreward, and shortly afterwards they espied the piece of wreck upon which the infant was secured. To offer his services in the attempt to rescue the child was the first thought of the brave Darling, and the instant they had made out what it was, he plunged into the surf, and secured the boy, as has already been shown. But the infant was chilled, and apparently lifeless. The wrecker pressed it to his bosom and urged his way homeward to his little cot on the hillside as rapidly as possible. He handed the child over to his wife, a kind-hearted woman, who immediately rolled it in blankets, and applied such restoratives to its nostrils and temples as were at hand, when they shortly had the satisfaction of seeing it return to consciousness. The babe revived under the careful and watchful nursing of the good wife of Darling, and was eventually completely restored.

This worthy couple had lived together for nearly a score of years, but were childless. The good man took every means in his power to ascertain the parentage of the charming boy, but the fragments of the wreck which reached the shore only gave evidence of the completeness of the vessel's destruction, and no clue could be had in any way to reveal the little one's secret. It was believed by Darling and his neighbours that its parents must have been lost on the night of the fatal wreck, and no token ever appeared which in the remotest degree determined the name or character of the lost vessel, or those who might have been on board her. In reply to his oft-repeated inquiries, in and about the vicinity, no satisfaction could be obtained, and months expired before his preserver had fixed upon a future course, definitely, in reference to the infant. In the meantime, both he and his wife had become warmly attached to him, and at last, believing that he had been made an orphan by the disaster on the morning he had been rescued, they concluded to adopt him as their own, and thenceforward ceased further inquiry.

On the night he was borne to the cottage, his saturated dress had been removed, and upon his left arm was found a massive golden clasp, surmounted with costly pearls and a large oval-shaped coral. It was removed from his wrist, and upon the inside were found engraved the letters "H. D." The clasp was an old-fashioned ornament, and upon the coral was cut in relief a miniature head representing the features of a well-favoured man. The bauble was laid aside, and though of very little worth, apparently, in the estimation of his rough benefactor, it was placed away safely by his wife, who believed it valuable, and who fancied that perhaps it might lead to discoveries sooner or later. She therefore preserved it carefully, and the coincidence of the last letter seemed very *apropos* when they began to talk of a name for the boy. To correspond with the initials, they determined to call him Henry Darling.

The boxes had been seized as they floated to the shore, but their contents were valueless from the effects of the salt water. Their marks and numbers gave no clue to the information which was so much

desired, and though the affair occasioned some talk in the town near by, it was at length forgotten, save by old Ben and his wife. The child, who was apparently some two years old, soon became accustomed to his modest but comfortable quarters, the care of his adopted parents was unremitting, and the youngster, though he mourned a little at first, soon got to be as "happy as a prince."

The bereaved father arrived at his splendid but now desolate home, with a widowed and withering heart. The awful scene he had been so suddenly called to pass through haunted him day and night, and rendered him utterly miserable. He mourned the loss of a beautiful young wife, to whom he had been married but three short years, and his babe had also been taken from him, the boy on whom he doted with all a father's fondness. For the year previously he had been upon the continent, and having concluded his tour, he sailed from Constantinople with his little family, bound directly home.

He was a gentleman of rank and fortune, and possessing rare professional abilities, he had been returned by his friends to the House of Commons, as the member from the borough in which he was born. He was scarcely twenty-eight years old when he left England on a tour of pleasure with his wife and child, and after a twelvemonths' absence, on his homeward passage, he had been thus suddenly deprived of all he really held dear in life. The blow was a terrible one to his young heart—he never recovered from the shock. His manners, which up to this period had been of the most fascinating and agreeable character, were soon entirely changed, as were also his habits. He became secluded, his intercourse was forbidding, his temperament grew churlish, and finally morose; and he seemed to seek in constant retirement, for a time, relief for his troubled mind. He turned thorough bookworm, and at last he shunned associates, except when seen in his office, or occasionally upon some important cause in the courts, for he was a member of the legal profession, and ordinarily chose to be alone by himself.

As he advanced in years this habit grew upon him, and though he had turned his attention latterly to the practice of the law, he had no need of it. He was wealthy, and formerly had been proverbial for his liberality; but he had now adopted a strict *regime* of economy in his personal and household affairs, and his altered manners was the subject of very general remark. With other changes came the love of money-getting, and though he was possessed of ample means, he grew avaricious; and as he became richer, in fact, he became poorer in his own estimation, until at last the love of gain seemed to be his predominating feature; his property was placed in the most profitable condition, and his money was invested where it would return him the surest and largest dividends.

In the course of time he had become highly distinguished in his profession, and was already looked up to by his brethren as a most able exponent of the law; but he had acquired an extraordinary love of lucre, which finally overbalanced all other considerations with him. His heart gradually hardened, he withdrew himself from society, he hoarded his gains, and thought of little else save fat clients, whom he

might fleece from time to time, or the augmentation of his rent roll by the defalcation of his mortgages. And thus he lived on.

Some twenty leagues distant from the scene where the wreck occurred lies the populous and thriving port of Plymouth; and about fourteen years afterwards the foster-father of young Darling carried his charge thither, at the age of sixteen, to place him an apprentice to a jeweller there, an old friend of the boy's preserver, who was then doing a good business in a fashionable part of the town, and who very gladly took Harry into his employ, upon the warm recommendation of a man he had known from his youth up. In this town there lived a family who had seen better days, but who now occupied a humble sphere, and who were obliged to labour daily for their sustenance. The parents were honest and industrious, and had an only child, a daughter scarcely thirteen years old. Alice Durand was a bright-eyed, sunny-faced creature, and though so young, her sweet temper and gentle manners had won for her the esteem of all who came in contact with her. Though her family was obscure, she had many friends who loved her for her purity of character, and she was not ashamed to exert herself to aid in the family's support, so far as her humble ability would tend to it.

She had acquired a knowledge of embroidery in her younger days, and she found ample occupation for her time in braiding hair-work for one or two of the best jewellers in town, who depended on Alice for their choicest patterns of the then fashionable necklaces, bracelets, etc., which were much worn, and were wrought in hair and gold.

She entered the store of her patron one morning, about six months after young Darling's arrival in Plymouth, where her eyes encountered among the operatives the face of a youthful stranger whom she had never noticed before, and who waited upon her with marked politeness. She concluded her errand, and passed quietly from the shop, when the curiosity of Harry was excited by her expressive face, and he involuntarily inquired of his fellow-clerk who it was.

"The sweetest girl in town, Alice Durand."

"Does she often call here?" asked Harry.

"Never but when she comes to return an order."

"She appears very modest."

"She is a lovely creature, and half the men in town would give their all to possess her. But she does not seem to fancy any one, though she is by no means a coquette."

"This is singular," said Harry, abstractedly.

"Very," rejoined the other, as he resumed his work.

CHAPTER III.

HARRY'S ACQUAINTANCE WITH ALICE.

"But thou art false! as false and fair
As yonder changing April sky;
Alas! that one with charms so rare,
Should only seek to please the eye!"

More frequent than usual had been the visits of Alice to the establishment of Farquand the jeweller, where Harry was employed, during the year following the commencement of his apprenticeship, and a most favourable intimacy had grown up between the young couple, which was now rapidly ripening into a deeper feeling; and already had Harry visited the beautiful girl at her father's residence, where he had been very cordially received by her worthy parent, who had taken pains to satisfy himself of young Darling's good character and industrious habits. Alice had lost her mother two years before, and the father encouraged the acquaintance, which he saw with satisfaction was so agreeable to his lovely daughter.

Harry noted with proud delight that Alice was deeply beloved by her numerous friends, and well he knew that none compared with her in form or feature. Never did the sweet girl appear so happy as when she was in the society of young Harry; and thus the months and years flew merrily on as the latter approached to manhood, looking forward with hope to the time when he should attain his majority, and be able to begin the world upon his own account. He did not forget his kind foster-parents, with whom he was in constant communication by letter, and he now began to calculate upon plans for the future. He had been able to amass but a trifling amount towards establishing himself in business; and saving honesty, a good reputation as a workman, and well-known habits of industry, he had little to encourage him.

But the father of Alice had watched the course of Darling and the intimacy which existed between him and his much-loved daughter. They had grown up together—he thought he had proved the character of the young jeweller, and feeling a deep solicitude for the welfare of his child, he proposed to loan Harry four hundred pounds to begin with. Four hundred pounds was a large sum, however, and it was easier to propose this than to carry the offer into execution; at lēast so thought Harry. During the five years of his apprenticeship, he had been able to save scarcely the fourth part of this, but the latter insisted, and preparations were made forthwith to carry out his plan. A small amount had been set aside by Alice, who originally made the proposal to her father; but Mr Durand was satisfied with his *own* intentions, and he looked about him for some one who might have the desired

amount in hand to loan, for which he offered the security of his unencumbered dwelling—his own homestead.

The house had been his father's, and *his* father's before him, but as yet had never been cumbered by lien. Harry knew nothing of the means to be employed to aid him, and weeks passed without effecting the loan. Darling continued in his master's employ, hoping for better times; and still the industrious and faithful Alice toiled on, encouraging her lover, and looking forward with bright hopes to the hour when Harry should become his own master, and when he could act for himself.

Some time previously, there came to reside in Plymouth a gentleman from one of the northern counties, who had relatives in the town, and where he soon attracted considerable notice among the residents in that *quarter* which he selected for his residence. He came from aristocratic rank, and his acquaintance was eagerly sought after by the best society in the place. But his *hauteur* of manner, and the cold reserve which characterized his address, rendered him inaccessible save to the favoured few, who looked up to him as a very extraordinary personage. He was a finely-formed man, apparently under forty, his countenance was commanding and intellectual, and his conversation, when he chose to display himself, was most scrupulously polished.

His wealth was reputed to be enormous, and he sought opportunity from time to time, for the investment of his surplus funds in the town he had adopted as his future home. His leisure hours were devoted to imparting "chamber counsel" to those who could afford to pay for his advice, and it was very soon known that he was well versed in the intricacies of English law.

Lord Ermont, for such was the title by which the stranger was known, had a brother residing in Plymouth, a commoner, but a man of great wealth, high pretensions and consequent influence. The Erhenart family and their numerous connections formed no small portion of the *élite* of society in the most fashionable quarter of the town, and Ella, the eldest daughter, was a pattern of pseudo-aristocracy. Proud and haughty in the extreme, she was insolent to her equals in rank, overbearing to her inferiors, beautiful in exterior, but selfish and minus all the finer feelings and sensibilities which adorn her sex. The butterflies of fashion flitted about her, but she was a coquette. She was mistress of her own fortune, having attained her majority, but as yet she enjoyed her liberty.

She was a liberal patron of the superb establishment of Farquand the fashionable jeweller; her visits there had latterly become very frequent. The shrewd merchant was in the height of his prosperity, encouraged and fostered by the money-spending Erhenarts and their *coterie*, and often was the elegant family carriage of herself or friends seen before his door, upon real or imaginary business. Some months before, the votary of fashion had chanced to encounter Harry Darling there, and her whole mind was now wrapt in but a single object—that of finding favour with the handsome jeweller!

Long did she nurse the feeling secretly, but ardently; and her patronizing air toward the humble mechanic was observed by his associates. But he never dreamed of the matter, and months had passed ere she attempted to reveal it. Learning at last that his better

feelings were interested in another quarter, she determined to outwit her rival, trusting to her station and address for success. The proud beauty saw the palpable difference in their rank; she calculated upon a contest with her relatives and associates; she thought of her aristocratic parents; she weighed all the chances; but she loved the humble youth, if ever woman loved, and she determined to possess him. Harry was flattered by the great lady's partial attention, but he had no thought of the feeling which prompted it. The calls of the rich lady became more frequent. She chose to trade only with Darling, and the acquaintance had at length grown into intimacy. He gave back no reciprocate feeling, he entertained not the remotest idea of love for the wealthy aristocrat; but she tortured his attentions into feelings of a deeper meaning, and emboldened, she ventured further.

The liveried lackey of the Erhenarts entered the store of Farquand one evening, and handed a perfumed note to the attendant, addressed to Henry Darling, Esq. It was passed over to him; he opened it, and read as follows:—

"The friendly compliments of Miss Erhenart to Mr Darling. It would afford Miss Ella the highest gratification to meet Mr D. at her father's residence, in company with a few selected friends—on Friday evening.

ELLA.

"Chateau Blanc, Duke Street.

The novelty of this proceeding pleased the vanity of Harry, and embracing an early opportunity to obtain leave of absence, he determined at once to respond to the invitation.

The appointed evening arrived, and at ten o'clock a plain cabriolet stood before the hotel of the humble jeweller's apprentice. Harry had reached his twenty-first year, and his fine manly form was well developed. He was erect and easy in his manners, and his familiarity with the ordinary topics of the day, for his leisure had been devoted to study, rendered him pleasing and attractive in conversation. An hour afterwards, he was set down at the door of the costly mansion of the Erhenarts—Chateau Blanc, Duke Street.

"What hour, sir?" inquired the driver, as he stepped out.

"At one," replied Darling—and his hand touched the bell-pull.

A powdered valet ushered him into the lofty reception-room, he passed his card, and shortly afterward the name of "Mr Darling" was echoed, as the handsome youth, neatly attired, approached the aristocratic drawing-room of the haughty millionaire. He stood upon the threshold of the brilliantly-lighted apartment, he faltered a moment in the blaze, his name was repeated—he moved gracefully to the splendid assemblage of rank and fashion, when a fair hand was extended towards him, and the beautiful Ella advanced and presented him personally to her friends.

A knot of jewelled beauties occupied a remote corner of the saloon. They scanned the young stranger, in his tasteful attire, and even while they admired his appearance, the tongue of scandal was at work. They envied the marked attention extended to him, but he was the chosen guest of their beautiful hostess, and though they questioned who and what he was, they could not but tolerate him.

Among the gentlemen present was the haughty Lord Ermont. Cold and reserved, he moved about through the throng, the observed of all observers—calm, dignified, almost unapproachable. He advanced towards the group of ladies we have spoken of, and coldly acknowledged his acquaintance. The foremost attempted to rally him upon his chilly composure in the midst of so much hilarity and cheerfulness, but he feigned a smile and passed on to another knot who surrounded the young jeweller, and who stood delighted listeners to the agreeable conversation and bearing of the humble mechanic. He was immediately hailed by Ella, who formally presented her *protege*.

"Uncle," she said—"Lord Ermont, Mr Darling."

Harry moved gracefully in acknowledgment of the honour of being presented to his lordship, and put forth his hand. Ermont extended a finger, bowed and passed on. He recognized the jeweller's apprentice whom he had met before at Farquand's, and was evidently in no wise pleased with seeing him thus entertained by his aristocratic niece.

The supper summons came, and Harry proffered his arm to the belle of her clique—Ella Erhenart—at whose side he enjoyed an agreeable *tête-à-tête*, and upon returning to the spacious drawing-room, a portion of the party had chosen the broad terrace in the rear of the mansion for promenade. Ella hung upon the arm of the handsome youth, they sauntered forth into the mild, open air, and almost unconsciously Darling found himself in front of a small latticed arbour at the extreme end of the colonnade, alone with the polished coquette.

"I am most happy, Mr Darling," she said, as they sat upon a rich divan in the recess, "that you favoured us with your society here to-night. I had almost feared you would disappoint us."

"*Us*, madam?"

"I speak for myself, Mr Darling, and thank you for the friendly correction."

"Do not mistake me, madam. I was about to observe that you alone are the only person here, saving Lord Ermont, whom I have casually met, that I have the honour of being acquainted with. I surely could not but obey your friendly summons."

"I trust we may now feel better acquainted."

"This is very kind in you, lady. May I ask to what particular act of my life I am indebted for this attention at the hands of the proudest lady in Devonshire?"

"Mr Darling, may I be frank with you?"

"Madam, I should grieve to feel that you could be otherwise."

"And you will not take offence?"

"The poor mechanic could hardly be offended at the words of the noble Ella Erhenart," said Harry, in his blandest manner.

"At least, then, you will listen to me."

"Lady, I am all attention."

"A year has passed since I first had the pleasure of meeting you. Chance threw you in my path, but humble as you deem yourself, I can never forget the moment when first I saw you. I have a secret, Mr Darling, to entrust to you, one which may—"

"Madam," said Harry, earnestly, interrupting her, "I pray you, do

not make me the participator in a secret I should not know."—"You promised to listen, Mr Darling?"

"I did, lady."

"But a twelvemonth since, and Ella Erhenart believed there did not live the man upon whom she could honestly lavish her affections—"

"Lady, I beg you pardon me," insisted the youth, as he began to fear the *denouement* of this singular and sudden interview.

"You refuse, then, to hear me?" said the proud girl, bitterly mortified at the most unexpected turn her affair had assumed.

"I cannot refuse to listen to you, madam. I am your guest, your unsolicited guest, so far as myself is concerned. Most sincerely would I avoid giving offence to one whom I esteem so highly as I ought the fair Miss Erhenart."

"But you would tamper, Darling. You would lead me to believe that—"

"No, lady. Your pardon yet again. I would not have the noble Ella Erhenart, whose proud position towers so high above the humble jeweller's, place herself falsely before him, or do aught she might regret. I do not know the secret you would impart. I pray you pardon me for desiring—"

"Yet listen to one word," continued the girl, as Harry arose and offered her his arm to return to the saloon—and her dark eye flashed upon him, nervously, as she looked earnestly in his face.

"You will not trifle with me?"

"Lady!"

"I have a name, a fortune, a pride—hundreds of flatterers hover about the person of Erhenart's daughter—but I live for *myself*. Feelings to me unknown before we met have been kindled by our intercourse, and the revelation *must* be made. The secret concerns yourself."

"Lady, your pardon once again. What you have to reveal concerning myself I am at a loss to imagine; but I may surely ask the favour at your hands that some more fitting opportunity than this may be chosen for conference. Your absence must have been observed, and the tongue of scandal, lady—"

"I yield," said Ella, promptly, as she took the extended arm of Darling; "but we shall meet again?"

"I shall be proud to wait upon you, madam."

"And when?"

"At Miss Ella's leisure."

"On Monday evening next?"

"On Monday be it."

"At the chateau?"

"At the chateau, madam."

"At ten o'clock?"

"At ten—"

"My carriage will wait at your hotel."

"I shall be ready, lady."

"Your honour, Darling?"

"My honour is pledged, lady."

The couple moved down the terrace to the saloon, and were soon among the crowd again. The clock struck one a few minutes after. Darling exchanged glances with the aristocratic beauty, she accompanied him to the threshold of the drawing-room, he moved to the gay crowd, and shortly afterwards was on his way home, his mind filled with strange and conflicting thoughts at his singular adventure.

Lord Ermont had been gone some time. He recognized Farquand's apprentice, and he was annoyed at the attentions paid him by his niece. He had already determined to put his brother—her father—upon his guard.

CHAPTER IV.

HARRY KEEPS HIS APPOINTMENT.

"No! if the fervent love of years
Responsive passion may not move—
I would not win by sighs or tears
His *pity*—when I sought his *love!*"

In spite of the hints thrown out by Erhenart's daughter, Harry had not the most remote idea of her objects or intents. There existed so wide a gap between their relative positions, he had not a thought that the mystery she seemed desirous to impart to him had any bearing upon other matters than his individual character or interest in some way, and he felt curious, now he had time to reflect upon the subject, to know what it really was.

At ten o'clock on the Monday evening following, the elegant private carriage of the rich commoner's daughter stood in waiting before the door of Harry's lodgings. He had pledged his word to comply with the request of Miss Ella, though his heart failed him, as he dwelt upon the probabilities which thrust themselves upon him in reference to the secret she proposed to force upon him. Though her visits had been repeated, and often, at his employer's, he did not think his limited acquaintance with the lady warranted this apparently special confidence, and though he desired to see the end of the adventure, he feared the result. However, having attired himself with scrupulous neatness he descended, entered the carriage, and the vehicle soon after drew up at the Chateau Blanc.

Harry's heart throbbed audibly, as he mounted the marble steps which led to the spacious dwelling, but he very shortly found himself in the private drawing-room of Miss Ella Erhenart, who received him warmly, in her customary winning and polished manner. She was a lady of commanding and elegant person; her countenance was most agreeable, and her voice exhibited all the tone and music of high breeding. On the present occasion she was somewhat tremulous in

her speech, but she soon mastered her embarrassment, and accosted Harry cheerfully.

"You have redeemed your pledge, Mr Darling."

"I could not do less, madam, assuredly."

"I am most happy thus to meet you."

"Lady, I fancy the obligation rests upon *my* side. The honour you confer upon me I cannot but appreciate."

"I have learned, Mr Darling," continued the proud lady, "that you have well nigh completed your engagement with the house of Farquand, and like most young gentlemen, upon arriving at majority, you undoubtedly feel an ambition to commence the world upon your own account."

"Such is my wish, lady; but at present I have not the means to gratify it. To compete successfully with rivals in *my* profession, requires a greater amount of capital than is within my command."

"Mr Darling, I had thought of this. You will pardon me, but the interest I have taken in yourself and your prospects, is neither sudden nor trifling, and I frankly offer you the means to satisfy your ambition."

"Madam!" exclaimed Harry, in utter amazement.

"I pray you listen, Mr Darling. The proffered kindness—if you please to term it thus—which I had intended when last we met to surprise you with, you chose to ward off by the course you then adopted. Will you now gratify me by listening to what I have to propose?"

"Lady, you are too kind; and I cannot possibly conceive that I have any claim upon you for the very favourable notice you are thus pleased to confer upon one who has no probable means in his power to requite this kindness."

"That is my affair, Darling. A year has passed since we first became acquainted. I have watched your career with a deep solicitude, and I confess to you frankly—indelicate as you may deem the confession—that other feelings than those of cold friendship have prompted me to press this interview upon you."

"Lady! Do I understand that you—"

"Hear me one moment. Ella Erhenart is the daughter of a gentleman of wealth; she has rank, character, riches in her own right—she is mistress of her own desires, the controller of her own fortunes. Surrounded by flatterers, she is beset by the importunities of a score of admirers, who would resign title and fortune for the compensation of her smiles. But I know you better, Darling, than you imagine; and I venture to avow to you that you have made an impression upon my heart—an impression, Darling, which time can never eradicate."

"Lady!"

"One word more. I offer you the means to become a man of fortune. I am well aware of the proud spirit which animates you, and you need not stoop to a feeling of dependence. I freely offer you any and all the means you may desire to compete with your more prominent and wealthy rivals; I offer you a heart, Darling, devotedly

your own; I offer you a hand, perfectly free to act for itself; I offer you, at once, myself and fortune."

Such a *finale* as this would ordinarily have turned the heads of most young men, but it only served to astound our hero, who had never dreamed of a scene like this, and who sat in utter astonishment, gazing at the proud girl before him, unable for a moment to articulate a single syllable. At length he found speech.

"Madam," he said, "had I for an instant imagined I could by any possibility have been placed in the trying situation I so unexpectedly find myself, I could not have dared to trust myself here to-night. Your friendly notice of my humble self, in the first instance—your—your offer, now—I—I have no words, lady—to thank you for. The proud daughter of Ernest Erhenart forgets her station, her rank in society, her beauty, her noble relatives and friends; she stoops from a lofty pinnacle, when thus she flatters the humble artisan. I appreciate fully your kindness, your feelings, your motives, lady—and to the latest day of my life this generous condescension will be treasured in the heart of him who has now been entrusted with your 'secret.' This world shall never, through me, be made acquainted with this interview; but, lady, flattering as is your proposal, kind as are the terms in which you have deigned to make it, promising as is your offer, I have no heart to respond."

"Darling!"

"Hear me, lady—I listened patiently to *you*. I have but a single word more. The heart of Henry Darling is not his own; it is gone from him, long since; it is in another's keeping, beyond the power of his control. Fate has willed that another should possess that heart; and much as he pities the lady Ella—if she be sincere—he is proud to say he loves, and is beloved!"

With this, Darling rose to leave the room.

"Madam, we may continue friends, I trust, and the humble mechanic, doubly grateful for the confidence now reposed in him, will always consider it an honour to meet and be acknowledged by the daughter of Ernest Erhenart. He will return to his humble position, and always respect and honour the station of her who has reposed in him the revelation which caused this night's interview."

"And you reject my offer, Darling?"

"Lady, no choice is left me."

"You have decided?"

"Madam, I have!" continued Darling, firmly.

"And so have I!"

The door suddenly opened, and the disdainful father of Ella entered the room, as Darling bowed respectfully, and left the lady oppressed with mortification and chagrin. The carriage still stood before the door; Darling entered it, and was driven to his lodgings.

"Tell me, Miss Ella," said the old aristocrat, sharply, "the object of this young man's frequent visits in my house?"

"Frequent, father?"

"On Friday last he was your especial guest, I noticed, and your marked attentions to him on that occasion I find is already the subject

of conversation. I now find him in your private drawing-room. Your visits to his master's store are quite too frequent; and once for all I insist this intercourse with a low mechanic, an adventurer, is neither acceptable to me, nor becoming the position of Ernest Erhenart's daughter. You may be a baroness, a duchess, if you will; and I trust this visit will be his last. Do you understand me?"

"I understand you. You are mistaken in your imagination, sir; but you will not be offended again with his presence."

"I am not alone in my surmises. Your uncle, Lord Ermont, informs me that it is a matter of scandal, your notice of this youth. I charge you—avoid the augmentation of these disgraceful rumours."

"I shall observe your advice," continued Ella, without knowing scarcely a word she said. "He will never have occasion to annoy you with his presence here again."

"I shall provide against this, to be sure of it," continued the nettled parent. And he at once set about giving such orders to his menials as he presumed would effect his object—so far, at least, as his own premises were concerned.

The haughty lady, who had trusted to her own position and prowess for at once captivating the heart of the innocent mechanic, sat alone in her boudoir, a short time afterwards, with her face hidden in her hands, deeply mortified and enraged with the result of the conference upon which she had so easily and fondly calculated. She had imagined that her propositions to the young jeweller would of course meet with favour, and having misconstrued his gallantry and politeness, she deemed *this* conquest would be an easy one!

All feelings of affection now vanished on the instant, pride came to her relief, and feeling convinced that the natural good sense of Darling would prompt him to keep her secret (for she had the power to deny any assertion he might make, had he not voluntarily pledged himself to silence on the subject), she determined to pursue him, secretly, and sooner or later to be avenged upon him for the slight which had thus wounded her pride, and which rankled deeply in her heart.

Her whole train of thoughts and designs was changed at once towards him, and from that hour forward she determined to follow on his track, until she should succeed in bringing him to her feet! Thus was the arrogant beauty transformed into a vengeful enemy towards the unsuspecting mechanic, who continued to labour on, and, true to his honour, gave no hint of the extraordinary scene which had been enacted at the chateau, the consequence of which, though he had no means of knowing it, was destined most seriously and terribly to affect his after-life!

The visits of the fashionable lady at the extravagant establishment of Farquand were continued; for she well knew that her withdrawal thence would not only be observed, but her plans could be carried out only by a constant communication, through this channel, with her intended victim. Her manner was but slightly changed, she still vouchsafed her patronage there, and time passed on.

The father of Alice had communicated with Lord Ermont, and

finally effected the loan he desired through that gentleman, to whom a bond had been given for four hundred pounds sterling, payable twelve months afterwards, backed by security upon his little homestead. Ermont had no occasion to inquire what disposal was to be made with the funds; his security was ample, the interest was satisfactory, the money was advanced, and the bond had been duly registered.

The money was immediately placed in the hands of young Harry, who gladly embraced the opportunity, and but a little time elapsed ere he found himself very prettily located in a small but convenient store on the square opposite to his employer's establishment, where, with his little capital and a good credit, he soon made an acceptable display, and finally commenced business with a fair prospect of eventual success.

CHAPTER V.

VISIT FROM A STRANGER.

"The storm is gathering over him,
His early hope is gone;
The skies that used to cover him
With beauty—now have none!"

DARLING, in his personal address, was polished and persuasive; and long ere he had reached his majority, by close application he had become a master of his profession. The acquaintances he had formed while in the employ of Farquand were widely extended, and a very large portion of their favour and support was at once yielded to the new house, where, for a time, everything went on swimmingly with him. His attractive establishment was attended by the wealthy and fashionable, and his business proved lucrative for a while, and promised him a fortune in a few years. Those who called once upon the polite and "handsome jeweller," came again; and though his means had been small, comparatively, at the outset, he was now getting along prosperously, and a very showy display of rich goods ornamented his cases.

Some six months after Harry commenced operations here, a rough-featured, but well-dressed stranger entered his store, and inquired for Mr Darling. Harry responded, and the man requested the favour of a private interview with him. The young attendant left the store, and the stranger thus addressed himself to the proprietor.

"My name is Harmon, sir. Twenty years ago, I left England for Calcutta; my profession had previously been that of a mariner, and having as a captain in the merchant service been highly successful, on my arrival in India I resolved to remain there, and soon afterwards embarked my capital in trade, in the hope of realizing a competency in time. I resided there until within a twelvemonth, and

having accumulated a fortune, I have returned to my native land once more, and hope to pass the rest of my days here. Among my effects, I have brought with me a set of jewelled bracelets, of extravagant cost and value, which I am desirous to dispose of to the best advantage; and looking about me here, I have been strongly commended to yourself by gentlemen of character and standing as a competent judge of the article, and a fitting person to take charge of this commission. If you can sell them, I shall be glad to remunerate you liberally for your trouble."

Darling's integrity, his character and excellent knowledge of his profession, had been the occasion of his thus receiving the preference, and he informed the stranger that he would receive the bracelets and do his best to dispose of them advantageously. Next day, Captain Harmon appeared in the jeweller's store with his precious ornaments, which proved to be a magnificent pair, studded with very large diamonds of the first water—each bracelet being valued at five hundred pounds sterling.

The jeweller receipted to the captain for the jewels in the presence of his clerk, and the stranger departed. As opportunity presented, the proprietor exposed the splendid ornaments to his aristocratic customers, who happened to call in from day to day; but their high cost prevented an early sale, and they still occupied the massive golden case in which he had received them.

It was a lovely day in June, and the whole fashionable world was abroad. The visits of Miss Ella to the new concern had been occasional only—but the callers at Darling's store during the day had been numerous. It had got to be late in the afternoon, when the showy equipage of the Erhenarts dashed up to his door, and Miss Ella, accompanied by a strange lady, alighted and entered the store. It was her first visit for a fortnight; but as usual, Darling was all obsequiousness and attention to his aristocratic patrons.

A few small purchases had been made, and nothing unusual occurred at the moment. Darling's habit had been, upon all suitable occasions, to exhibit the rich bracelets; and though Miss Ella had seen them many times before and admired them much, she proposed to show them to her friend. The proprietor handed out the casket, turned a moment to envelop the trifles the ladies had bought, handed over the parcel, and as they seemed to be somewhat in haste, it being nearly dark, he bowed his noble customers to the door, and they entered the carriage, which rolled away homeward—while the fortunate jeweller peeped out at his rivals on the opposite side of the way, with feelings of honest pride that he should enjoy the countenance of such wealthy and honourable patrons!

He returned behind his counter, adjusted his trays, and raising the case which should contain the costly bracelets—*it was empty!* He hastily, at first—then scrupulously examined the show-case, the counter, the floor—but the jewels were gone! Astounded and alarmed at this inexplicable mystery—for he had seen the bracelets but five minutes previously, and no one having been present in the store, save himself and his two wealthy patrons—he was utterly at a

loss to comprehend their extraordinary disappearance. He searched again and again; but the jewels were not to be found.

To submit to such a loss quietly was entirely out of the question. He was unable to do it; he did not possess in the world sufficient to replace them, and his distress was most intense. The position of his wealthy customers was such, that he could never substantiate a charge of theft against them, or either of them—but what remained for him to do?

He knew the character of Ella's scornful father—he thought he knew the daughter; but his all was at stake—character, business, prospects, responsibility to the owner; and ruin stared him in the face, turn where he might! He reflected; he remembered the bitter words of Ella when he rejected her offer, he weighed the matter well, and his mind was made up. It was evening. He directed his assistant to close the store at an early hour, took the empty case in his hand, and called a cabriolet.

"Which way?" asked the driver.

"To the Chateau Blanc, Duke Street."

Darling had not forgotten his last visit at the magnificent mansion of the Erhenarts, when he was borne thither in the private carriage of Miss Ella, and where he encountered the chilling and insolent gaze of her father as he left the apartment, upon the conclusion of his memorable interview with the disappointed daughter; and he could not but contrast the object of his present mission thither with the other, as he now hurried along to his destination. He reached the lordly dwelling, he mounted the steps, passed the lacquey, who did not recognise him, and inquired imperatively for the master of the house.

"Your card, sir," said the servant.

"Say to Mr Erhenart that a gentleman would confer with him for one moment on urgent business, and would see him alone—*alone*, sir!"

The attendant bowed and retired, and five minutes afterward the humble mechanic was ushered into the august presence of the haughty commoner, in his private study.

"How's this, sir?" inquired the aristocrat, evidently surprised at what he deemed audacity in the jeweller, and thinking of all things else than the real case for this unexpected call.

"Your humble servant, Mr Erhenart," said Darling, respectfully, approaching the proud millionaire.

"Your business, sir," repeated the other, coldly.

"Under ordinary circumstances, Mr Erhenart, the object of my mission here to-night would have been sufficiently distressing and humiliating—but, as it is—I feel—"

"I had imagined, young man, that you possessed more pride and spirit, low-born as you are, than to place yourself in a position towards *me*, which could leave me no alternative than to deal very plainly with you."

"I shall be glad to be heard, sir."

"You come, undoubtedly, to speak of my daughter. In advance, then, let me tell you I desire you will not mention her name. You

know my character, my feelings, sir. Your position and hers are widely at variance, and if you would allude to her, I must positively decline to hear you, and shall be glad to be the master of my own leisure, free from intrusion, sir!" Saying which, he was about to rise, as he pointed to the door.

"Mr Erhenart," continued Darling, choking with embarrassment, "I *do* come here to speak of your daughter; would to Heaven that some other alternative had been left me."

"I will not listen, sir."

"You *must* listen, Mr Erhenart," continued Darling, boldly; "or, within twenty-four hours, I publish to the world the details of a base transaction in which your daughter is too plainly implicated, and which, exposed, will lower the lofty crest even of the haughty Erhenart."

"Base? My daughter!" exclaimed Erhenart, deeply excited.

"Hear me, sir!" added Darling, as he drew forth from beneath his cloak the empty casket.

"Two hours ago, this case contained a pair of richly jewelled bracelets, worth a thousand pounds. They were upon my counter; I exhibited them, personally, to your daughter and her friend. I turned a moment to wait upon them, I handed them a small packet they had purchased, attended them to the door, and returning, the bracelets were gone! It is a terrible accusation, a terrible thought, sir, but no other persons were upon the premises at the time; from the instant I saw the jewels, until they departed. I had not taken my hand from the counter—and, painful as is the requirement, I charge the purloining, boldly but sorrowfully, upon the parties who were there."

"Can you be serious, sir?"

"Look in my face," continued Darling.

"Monstrous!" yelled the man, as his pent-up rage and mortification was about to burst forth.

But Darling remained cool and collected, and the other was shamed into calmness.

"You say, Mr Darling, you were alone?"

"I do."

"And a friend accompanied my daughter?"

"She did."

"Might not the other be implicated, sir?"

"She might. The other was a stranger to me, however, and I appeal to you, sir, to enable me to recover the lost property. I have told you all; but my name, my credit, my *all* is at hazard. I cannot replace the costly jewels, and if they are not forthcoming, Henry Darling is ruined!"

"You carry it boldly, proudly, sir!" said Erhenart.

"What is to be done?" insisted Harry.

"I will tell you, sir," replied the old man, promptly. And his hand was upon the bell-pull.

The valet answered.

"Ink and paper, sir."

It was brought, a note was hastily written, and despatched by the servant, and ten minutes afterward, Lord Ermont entered the apartment.

"Do me the favour," said Erhenart, addressing himself to Darling, "to repeat your scandalous accusation in presence of my Lord Ermont."

In a concise and candid manner, Darling related again all the circumstances of his loss, to which the brothers listened, calmly, and in silence.

The boudoir of Miss Ella was instantly searched in the most thorough manner; the premises were ransacked; the brothers, accompanied by Darling, repaired to the dwelling of the lady who had been present with Miss Ella at the store; the carriage, the servants, the footman, all were examined—but no trace of the lost bracelets could be discovered.

After the most ample investigation, and the apparently candid but bitter consent of the father had been given for unlimited inquiry, the poor jeweller was compelled, at a late hour of the night, to return to the hotel, after admitting to the brothers that all had been done which could be done, without any hope of recovering the stolen property!

"This comes of entertaining the *canaille*," coolly observed Lord Ermont to Erhenart, as they sat alone in the study of the latter, after the search.

"The low-born wretch!" continued Erhenart. "I am in a rage that I listened for one moment to the fellow's nonsense, for I now imagine he never had any such property as he describes, and I doubt much—"

"You are mistaken there, brother. I had occasion to visit his establishment yesterday, but a few minutes before the ladies were there, and saw your carriage at the door. I noticed those bracelets, and a superb article they were, too. They are unquestionably very valuable, and it is certainly most singular what could have become of them, under the circumstances. However, the matter will go no further, so far as we are concerned, I warrant. He made the most of his opportunity, and evidently has no hope here."

"The wretch!" continued Erhenart; "who is he?"

"Nobody knows. Some upstart—though he has a talent, I understand, in his profession. I am told he is in the good graces of Durand's daughter, the silversmith."

"I don't know him."

"You have heard of his daughter?"

"O, a pretty little thing—yes, yes, I have heard the girls speak of her embroidery! But you think he won't pursue this matter?"

"Never in this quarter. He hasn't the confidence to do it. He is in a dilemma, however, and the result of the matter will probably be his own arrest by the owner of the property whom he is unquestionably endeavouring thus to swindle."

"The mongrel villain!" concluded Erhenart, as he gulped down another glass of wine. "I pray you, Ermont, do not name this to Ella."

"To no one, surely. It was fortunate both the ladies were absent to-night," replied Ermont. And the brothers separated.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RUINED MECHANIC.—HIS DISTRESS.

"O, every word or kindly look,
Thou e'er to me hast given,
Is on my heart's unvarying page
As with a diamond graven!"

Upon an uneasy pillow during the night had Darling tossed, and when morning came, wearied with excitement and sleeplessness, he appeared at his place of business haggard and wretched. At the earliest moment he sent for Captain Harmon, the owner of the bracelets, who immediately answered his summons.

"You appear ill," said the kind-hearted man, as he entered the store.

"I am in deep distress, captain."

"What has happened?"

"The jewels you entrusted to my charge a few weeks ago have been stolen."

"What?"

"It is too true, captain."

And Darling at once entered into a detailed account of the whole proceeding, giving the names of the suspected parties, winding up by offering to place the captain in immediate possession of everything that he had in the world, after a fair compromise of his honourable debts. Upon examination of his affairs, however, it was found that he had not sufficient to liquidate the claims against him, and make good the price of the bracelets.

Captain Harmon proposed that matters should rest quiet a while, and public notice being given, some clue might perhaps be had to the stolen property. This generosity on the captain's part availed nothing, however; and a fortnight after the occurrence, Darling began to feel the effect of the circulation of the rumours, though the name of no one was made public in connection with the affair. But his business fell off, his expenses accumulated rapidly over and above the net profits upon his sales, and he was soon compelled to go into bankruptcy, his stock was sold at public vendue, and the store was closed.

But the heart-trial was yet to come. Ruined at the moment when he believed himself firmly established in his business, with a most promising prospect before him for the future, and having already determined, at an early day, to consummate his union with Alice, Darling was sufficiently wretched, without being compelled to add another

pang to his misery, or to give cause for suffering to the hearts of those he fondly loved, by a recital of the details of his trouble. But it remained for him yet to see Alice and her kind father, whose pecuniary ruin was involved with his own; for he had not been able to provide for the four hundred pounds Durand had loaned him at the commencement of his business, and this sum still remained against him, for which the old homestead was mortgaged to the miserly but wealthy Lord Ermont.

With a depressed and troubled heart did Harry approach the humble dwelling of his betrothed, on the evening of the day which succeeded the sale of his effects. His well-known rap was answered by the innocent and lovely being for whom only he lived, and her bright smile of welcome for an instant dissipated the gloomy thoughts which for days had brooded upon his mind. The lovers sat in the little parlour, and a melancholy scene succeeded.

"It's all over!" sighed Darling, at last

"What, Henry?"

"The sale is made, the owner of the bracelets is partially secured, my creditors get sixteen shillings to the pound, my business is concluded—and I am ruined!"

"Speak not so despondingly, Henry—there is always hope. The loss is severe, and must cause us all temporary embarrassment. But we have health, you have a good profession, you understand your business, and may readily get a living and lay by something towards ridding you eventually of your existing obligations; *I* can toil, you know—father is willing to do all he is able."

"O, do not name your father, Alice! How can I speak to him after what has happened, when he was so kind, in my attempt to start in life, to aid me by a loan for which his very roof is mortgaged, and who does not get a shilling in the result of my affairs! What can I say to him?" And he buried his face in his hands.

"Never fear," continued Alice, soothingly. "He knows all; he was present at the sale, and has already declared to me that his confidence in your ability and integrity is still unshaken."

"Generous man!"

"And, Henry, *I* have not been idle, you know. My matters have prospered unusually during the year past, and I have saved full forty pounds, which you—"

"Alice!" said Harry, proudly—but tears rushed to his eyes, as he was about to chide the innocent beauty at his side, and he only replied by pressing the affectionate maiden to his heart.

The beautiful Alice Durand sat in the recess of the parlour window, and Harry occupied a chair at her side. Upon a table in the centre of the room stood a vase filled with flowers, which Alice had gathered from her little garden, and at the side of the apartment hung the portrait of her dead mother. The old family clock stood in the corner, and as it struck the hour of nine, Darling again broke the silence.

"But the mortgage, Alice. It falls due in a few days, and cannot be renewed. I must see your father; we must provide for this, in

some way, else the old homestead is perilled."—"I had not thought of that, Henry."

"But I have thought of it."

"And so have I," said the father, who entered the apartment at this moment, with his hand extended to Darling, whom he greeted warmly.

"What can be done, good Mr Durand? You know all; I am glad you know the worst. I have laboured long and ardently to establish a reputation, and thought I had well nigh succeeded; I have toiled incessantly to lay the foundation of a future business; I have loved Alice, and dared to hope that at no very remote day she would be mine; but in the midst of all, the evil has come upon me. I am ruined myself—you, my kindest of friends, are involved in the crash—and my poor Alice must share in this trying misfortune! What can be done, sir?"

"Nothing, nothing, Darling. For five-and-thirty years, when sorrow or misfortune came, I have learned to look it straight in the face, and the present is not the moment for despairing. All depends upon the course we now pursue, for future good or ill results. I have done all that could be done, under the circumstances, and already have seen Lord Ermont, who holds the mortgage upon the little homestead. He has no disposition to accommodate evidently, and demands the money, or the forfeit of the bond. I have less than a hundred pounds in hand toward it, but he is unwilling to extend any portion of the amount. The bond is due on Thursday next."

"So soon?" eagerly asked Darling.

"Yes. I could bear up against ordinary difficulty, and believe I have a heart equal to everyday misfortune; but, Darling, this is the home of my father, and of his father before him, and until a twelvemonth since, nor bond, nor lien upon the old Durand estate ever yet existed. I should be sorry to see the old place pass into the hands of a stranger now," continued the old man; and a tear trickled down his rough cheek.

"You must not weep, Mr Durand—I cannot bear to witness this," urged young Darling, as he seized the hand of Durand. "How it may be done I know not, but the house shall not be sacrificed. You, my friend, the father of my Alice, I have unwittingly placed in this position, and I will relieve you, be sure of it!"

The old man dashed away the tear that was falling, and grasped the hand of Harry once more; and for a moment there was a deep silence in the little parlour.

"Lord Ermont has promised to call here to-morrow," said the old man, at last, "to examine the estate; and he hinted that he might be induced, possibly, to extend the whole loan for a short time."

"Upon what conditions?" inquired Harry.

"He stated no conditions, Darling."

"To-morrow, did you say, father?" asked Alice.

"To-morrow, at eleven, daughter. So you must put yourself in the best trim, and see that the place is in the best order. I shall trust much to your powers of persuasion, too, little one; for I do not

believe that Lord Ermont, avaricious as he is, can have the heart to turn my Alice out of doors—eh, Darling?"

But Harry's thoughts were suddenly running in a vein far different to what the old man fancied, as he merely noticed this last remark. Why it was, he couldn't tell exactly; but there was a foreboding of ill, in the promised visit of the wealthy and well-favoured aristocrat whom everybody lauded, and who might, peradventure, have other objects in view besides the mere arrangement of the claim due him—a matter which in Darling's estimation could have been concluded quite as appropriately, if not more so, by his lordship's "man of business." Darling was thoughtful during the rest of the evening, and uncommunicative until the father retired and left the lovers alone.

"I am sorry to see you so sad, Henry."

"Alice," said Darling—and he took her soft white hand in his—"I think, Alice, I have a hold upon your best affections."

"You do not doubt it, Henry?"

"No, Alice, no. But—"

"But what?"

"Henry Darling is no longer the Henry Darling of prosperity. I *had* a prospect but a few short weeks since, and I had hoped the hour was not very far distant when Alice would have become my bride. The current in my fortune is sadly changed, Alice. Is Henry Darling less dear to her he has so long and so faithfully loved?"

"Why these strange questions, Henry? Has Alice given you cause to doubt her?"

"No, dearest, no. But from your own lips, in my adversity, I would again hear the assurance which so often and so kindly you have vouchsafed to give me in our brighter days."

"Storm or sunshine, Henry, affects not the heart of Alice Durand towards him she has chosen above all others; prosperity or adversity will make no change in her feelings. Her troth is pledged to you, and you alone—the vow is recorded in heaven!"

"Thanks, Alice, thanks! Forgive the thought which but flashed upon me; I feel that I wrong you. But I charge you be prudent—cautious, Alice. You will think of my words hereafter. The proud Lord Ermont has you father in his power—at least he thinks so—and his visit here to-morrow bodes no good."

"I cannot believe that Lord Ermont has any sinister intentions. If so, what can they be?"

"Alice, Lord Ermont is a man of the world. He is grasping, arrogant, selfish. He will not suffer any ordinary obstacles to come between him and his wishes; and yourself, as well as your father, may well be upon the guard."

"I do not think he will be disposed to take any advantage of his position towards us."

"It is well, Alice. You are charitable, but again let me urge you to be cautious. Good-night." And the ardent lover impressed a fervent kiss upon the cheeks of his adored Alice, and promising to see her on the morrow, he departed for his lodgings.

Alice thought of Darling's words, but she could not comprehend

their import. The noble lord who held her father's bond was reputed to be a man of high character and influence, and she could not bring herself to the conclusion that he would stoop to any dishonourable action. But the caution of her lover dwelt on her mind, and she did not forget his words, though she had no possible conception of their real nature.

Her father had vainly endeavoured to raise the means elsewhere, for a limited time, to relieve himself of his pressing engagement with Lord Ermont, and failing to effect his purpose, he had waited upon his lordship and candidly informed him of the situation he found himself in. The wily financier saw his advantage at once; and knowing that Darling had made pretensions to the hand of the beautiful Alice, whom he had casually met, and of whom he had become deeply enamoured, he determined instanter, after his conference with old Durand, to avail himself of what he deemed a most favourable opportunity to advance his interest with his debtor's daughter.

Durand had no knowledge of his intentions, and when he proposed to call at his dwelling the next day, Durand imagined there was a prospect that the austere creditor would consent to the renewal of the claim, on an examination of the premises, and upon finding that his security was in every way ample. Little did the humble silversmith appreciate the real character of his creditor, the haughty Lord Ermont!

CHAPTER VII.

INTENTIONS OF LORD ERMONT.

"—What's the alternation?—
He craves the law, insists upon the penalty
And forfeit of his bond!"

Lord Ermont had happened in at Farquand's one day when Alice chanced to be present, and immediately his attention was arrested by the peculiar freshness and modest beauty of her who had won the feelings, at sight, of many others, before his lordship had seen her. He contrived to meet her again, and the impression she had made upon the heart of the noble miser was a lasting one. Twice he had crossed her in the public streets since then, and eventually he had traced her to her quiet home.

He became deeply interested in her, and being single, he had imagined that the lovely but humble embroideress could readily be won. Though there was so great a disparity in their ages, his lordship was a splendidly-formed man, and did not appear over thirty-five. With title, rank, wealth, reputation, everything else desirable, he doubted not that a triumph would be easy in this quarter; and great indeed

was his surprise to ascertain that this little beauty was the daughter of old Durand, whose bond he held, falling due in a few days, and which he knew him utterly unable to meet. He determined to make the most of his opportunity.

At eleven o'clock, on the day appointed, the rumbling of carriage wheels was heard in the retired street where Durand resided, and a magnificent vehicle, surmounted with its rich armorial bearings, suddenly halted in front of the homestead of the silversmith. A polished and gentlemanly man stepped from it, and entered the neat little dwelling which had been scrupulously prepared for the nobleman's visit. Mr Durand received his lordly visitor in person, and ushered him at once into the quiet little parlour where the interview had occurred between Alice and Darling, on the night previously.

"I am flattered, my lord," said Durand, as the aristocrat became seated, "at the honour your lordship has bestowed upon me by this visit, and assure you that it gives me pain to reflect that I am not better prepared to meet you in reference to the business which prompts this call. I have exerted myself to the utmost since I saw you last, but I regret to say that it will not be in my power to pay the whole of your claim which falls due in a few days."

"The note is due on Thursday, sir."

"I have not lost sight of that fact, sir—but it will be utterly impossible for me to pay it."

"This is unfortunate, Durand. Money is none the plentiest just now, and much as I might regret to do so I shall be compelled to foreclose the mortgage."

"If your lordship could consent to extending its payment for another year, I should be able to meet a fourth of it on Thursday, and the remainder in—"

"This is not my mode of doing business, Mr Durand, and I am—"

At this moment the conversation was interrupted, and the fair daughter of Durand, in her neatest attire, entered the parlour.

"I beg pardon, my lord; this is my daughter, Alice, my only child. Lord Ermont, Alice, the gentleman we had expected to-day."

Alice courtsied gracefully, and advancing with a sweet smile, extended her hand, and the proud Ermont arose and made an obsequious obeisance.

"We shall be very happy," said Alice, "if your lordship can find it convenient so to arrange the bond falling due that we may have a little time to liquidate the claim upon the homestead. My father disposed of the funds, and it has suddenly been lost through misfortune. But we have gathered and saved a hundred pounds, which, if Lord Ermont will accept, in another year we shall very probably be able to save the house. It would render us all so happy, that I can but think that Lord Ermont will agree."

"Your pardon, young lady. If it be in the power of Lord Ermont to serve the parent of so lovely a being as Miss Alice, it shall be done. May not your father and myself conclude the negotiation? Pray do me the favour for one moment."

Alice curtsied again, and left the room.

"Mr Durand, you have been improvident."

"My lord!"

"I understand you loaned the funds for which you have mortgaged your estate here, to the young man Darling, of whom report speaks latterly in no very flattering terms."

"I did loan the money thus, sir."

"You did wrong, sir. I think the man is altogether unworthy your kindness."

"You do not know Henry Darling, my lord."

"I know more of him than you imagine."

"You do not know him, or your lordship would never speak cavalierly of him," continued Durand, piqued at the allusions made by his visitor against the good name of Henry Darling.

"We shall not quarrel about the fellow," said Lord Ermont, shrewdly; "but, Durand, you would now save your property?"

"I am most anxious to do so, my lord."

"You surely would not turn that sweet creature from the roof beneath which she has been reared?"

"It is for *her*, my lord, that I feel most deeply. For myself, I could manage to—"

"It is in your power to serve me, Durand, to save your property, to be made easy for life!"

"My lord, you jest."

"No, on my honour."—"I beg your lordship will explain."

"You may doubly, trebly, quadruply pay me."

"My lord!"

"The charms of your daughter have made an indelible impression upon my heart. I have met her before to-day, and learned but yesterday that the only being I had seen to love for more than a score of years, was the daughter of Durand. You know me, sir. I have wealth, station, title; and the proudest act of my life will be to lay my name and fortune at the feet of your charming child."

"My lord, you astound me."

"I am serious, Durand. I will make any sacrifice for her favour, and I now formally propose to you for her hand. A release from your bond shall receive my signature on the instant, you shall be placed in a position worthy the father of my bride, and the beautiful Miss Alice may become the Lady Ermont!"

"My lord," stammered the bewildered parent, "I was not prepared for this. I can only say—"

"Have I the consent of the father honourably to press my suit?"

The old man was so suddenly taken by this extraordinary proceeding, that he had no words for reply. Before him was ruin, poverty, the stigma of being compelled to yield up the inheritance left him by his father—or wealth, relief, and ease; the price, his daughter's hand! In the midst of his embarrassment, he asked for time to reflect, and begged his lordship to give him till the morrow to decide.

"And you will reply to-morrow?"

"I will, my lord."

"The bond falls due the next day."

"I cannot forget it, my lord."

"I will wait on you, at eleven."

"I shall expect you, my lord."

Simply requesting that the result of the conference, thus far, should not be made known beyond his own family, Lord Ermont quietly entered his carriage once more, and departed to his hotel.

"Are you ill, father?" asked Alice, earnestly—entering the room as the equipage left the door, and seeing her father pale and in deep thought.

"No, daughter, no."

"Yet I see, by your distressed manner, there is no hope with your hard-hearted creditor."

"Alice!" said Durand, impressively, and he took her hand in his. "You would not see your old father driven from the quiet roof which for so many years has sheltered him and his child?"

"Dear father! You know my heart—you know my wishes in this matter."

"You would not be compelled, yourself, to be thrust out from the homestead, a comparative wanderer?"

"For myself, I care but little. You know, father, I am able and willing to toil, and I have the ability, fortunately, to earn my living, while I have health. But for you, dear father, who have been the kindest of parents—it is for you I feel that Alice would willingly do anything in her power, with honour, to save our home."

"I believe it, daughter."

"Trust me, father, if *I* can do anything."

"If you *might* save it, would you consent to some little sacrifice?"

"Anything—all things!"

"Lord Ermont speaks not well of Darling, Alice."

"Lord Ermont does not know him, father."

"He insists he does."

"And blames him?"

"He says he is unworthy of our—"

"Lord Ermont slanders him!" said the noble girl, rising to her feet. "But, father, no more of this. You have hinted that Alice can serve you."

"Daughter, it rests with you to save the homestead."

"With me?"

"With yourself, Alice. Lord Ermont is rich, titled, noble; your senior somewhat, truly—but he is enamoured of you! You have his heart—he has proposed for your hand. Will you be Lady Ermont?"

"Father!" gasped the tender girl—and sank fainting at his feet.

Half-an-hour passed ere Alice had thoroughly revived. When she came to consciousness, she found herself in the arms of her lover, who happened in at the moment she swooned. The father in his excitement and terror—for he firmly believed he had caused his daughter's death—frankly told Harry the particulars of their interview, and when she awoke, she looked up into her lover's face and asked for her father, who had just left her in charge of Darling, while he hurried out for a surgeon.

"Is he gone?" asked Alice.

"Who?"

"My poor father."

"He will return instantly."

"Be composed, dear Alice," said Harry, as he continued to apply restoratives to her temples. She rose in a few minutes, and seated herself at his side.

"You have not heard it, Henry?" she said.

"I have heard it all, dearest. Your good father will never mention the subject again. Be calm—you need entertain no fears of importunity."

"But the bond, Henry?"

"It cannot be met at maturity, I fear. But a compromise may be effected. Bear up, then, Alice; out of this proposition—for, at least, it has been honourably made by my lord—we may reap a benefit."

"And the homestead be saved?"

"I trust so."

"Without *that* sacrifice, Darling?" continued the girl, her cheeks paling again.

"Dear Alice, you need have no fears, I assure you."

In the evening of the same day, old Durand sat with his daughter and Harry Darling in the little parlour. The father had decided to permit the foreclosure to proceed, determined not to sacrifice his daughter's happiness, brilliant as had been the proposal. And he now reflected, too, upon the distress which must fall upon poor Darling, in his adversity, by such a course, and he was astounded that he should ever have entertained for an instant the proposition which had been made by Lord Ermont.

After a protracted and deliberate consultation, it was at last proposed by Harry that, under all the circumstances, they were bound to make the most out of the offer, and it was mutually agreed that when Lord Ermont should call on the following day, the father of Alice should confer with him and insist upon reasonable delay. He could not expect to press matters at once; the money had been loaned to young Darling, who might possibly pay it, if Lord Ermont would consent to a renewal of the bond, and was willing to wait three years. At the expiration of that period, if the money was not forthcoming, Alice should become his bride. She was yet young, but seventeen, and he could afford to wait if he was sincere.

These terms were to be offered him, which if he rejected, they should submit, and leave the law to take its course, while they must trust to the future for results. The plan appeared feasible, and filled with speculations of hope, the little party separated. On the morrow, Lord Ermont had proposed to wait upon his debtor for a final answer to his proposal, which the gay nobleman entertained no doubt would be gladly availed of. To him it seemed utterly impossible but that so brilliant a prospect as now would loom up before them could but lead them gladly to acquiesce in his proposal. The time was short, and the necessity urgent. On the day following that fixed upon for the interview, the bond fell due!

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PARTING SCENE BETWEEN ALICE AND HARRY.

"Misfortune still may follow me,
And doom me far to range!
But I shall ever faithful be—
I would not, could not, change.
Whatever lot henceforth be mine,
This heart is fondly, only thine!"

Henry Darling retired to his lonely chamber, and when at length he found himself alone, he reflected upon the stirring events which had crowded upon his path within the few weeks previously. From a position of comparative ease, with a brilliant prospect before him, he had suddenly become impoverished and almost penniless, without a single friend to whom he could turn for pecuniary aid. His brief experience had taught him how difficult it was to mount the ladder of prosperity, and he realized but too keenly, now, how easy it was to descend! He felt conscience-free from having committed any crime; the uncontrollable force of circumstances had placed him where he now stood; yet, turn in whatever direction he might, there was but one being who smiled upon him in his adversity. It was his faithful Alice, his world, his hope, his life. Vainly had he proffered his services to those who should have befriended him in this evil hour; in vain he made application for employment in the establishments where his skill was so well known.

Darling had lost caste suddenly with those who patronized and supported those men, and though they did not know the reasons, he was feared. His name was discreditably connected with the loss of the valuable bracelets, and though innocent of all participation in that loss, the world contended he had been careless, to say the least, and could not again be trusted. After visiting every jeweller in the town where he had hitherto passed so many years, and with so creditable a repute, he returned to his lodgings, utterly unable to obtain employment in any capacity in his profession. As he sank upon his restless pillow that night, his troublous thoughts may well be conceived.

But morning came at last. The world is wide, and Darling had determined upon a final course. He would see Alice, he would pour out his soul before her, he would leave the scene which had now become hateful to him, he would seek elsewhere an honourable living, and he flattered himself, dark as now seemed the prospect, that fortune would yet smile upon his honest efforts, and he should yet one day return again, to save the homestead, to redeem his sullied reputation, to claim the hand of her he so fondly loved.

At the hour agreed upon that day, Lord Ermont, faithful to his appointment, alighted from his carriage at the door of the humble silversmith, and shortly afterwards appeared in Durand's parlour. The good old man received him with measured civility, and informed his lordship that his extraordinary proposal had been duly submitted to his daughter. The brilliant offer was totally unexpected both to Alice and himself—they were comparatively strangers to each other; his lordship was sufficiently acquainted with the world to appreciate his feelings, under the peculiar circumstances; but she demanded that time should be allowed her before the consummation of an act which must affect her whole future life. Alice was yet young; and they entertained a pride in being freed from pecuniary obligation to his lordship ere she could consent to become his wife.

The subtle nobleman, delighted with his prospect, at once agreed that the course proposed had been delicately advised, and eagerly asked how long a delay the daughter would fix upon. Durand informed the noble suitor that Alice was but seventeen years old. If his lordship would consent to a renewal of the bond for three years, they felt that he would be able to liquidate his claim in, or within that period, and after this, she could feel at liberty more readily to entertain his proposition; but under no circumstances would she consent to hold out other encouragement. In the meantime, she should be left entirely at her own leisure, free from importunity, and if, at the termination of the time named, they had not, or could not discharge the debt, she honestly pledged him her hand in marriage.

Without the remotest intention of adhering to his agreement, for he firmly believed that it would be impossible for them to raise the required sum in that time, Lord Ermont accepted the condition, and agreed to renew the bond for three years longer, and the deed was executed forthwith. He proposed to remain upon terms of friendly intercourse with the family of Durand in the meantime, but pledged his word that he would in no wise interfere with the liberty or leisure of Alice, beyond what might prove entirely agreeable to the wishes of herself and her father. The papers were passed, the original bond was cancelled, the interview ended, and the infatuated nobleman retired, highly elated with his future prospect of becoming the husband of the prettiest maiden in the county of Devonshire!

Lord Ermont was well aware of the intimacy which had existed between young Darling and Durand's daughter, but he entertained no fears in regard to the rivalry of the prostrated jeweller. He employed those who watched the course of Harry, and he already had the means of knowing that the artisan was ruined, and that he had determined upon leaving the town in disgust. A single year's absence, or less, he believed, would give him sufficient time and opportunity to displace the "low-born mechanic" in the esteem of Alice, and he had resolved to take care—while no communication should pass between the lovers, after Harry left—that such rumours should be circulated from time to time in regard to him as he fancied might aid his own cause. Once in possession of the fair beauty, he feared nothing afterward, and nursing these thoughts, he returned to his pursuits.

In the meantime, as we have seen, Darling had determined upon his future course, and the hour for his final interview with Alice and her father was approaching. His little personal matters had been at length adjusted, he had secured a place in the coach bound north, and with a heavy heart he now approached the door of the dwelling which he was soon to leave behind him for a long, long day. The result of Lord Ermont's visit had been communicated to him; he had had a long and earnest conversation with old Durand, and at last he found himself alone with the cherished object of his affections.

"Do not weep, Alice," he said, passing his arm gently about her waist, "hope has deserted me here. I have already told you that my efforts to obtain employment in this place have proved entirely unavailing. It is ungrateful in them, Alice, for surely they can impart no crime to Henry Darling."

"O no, no!" earnestly uttered Alice.

"I could not bear ordinary reproach," continued Harry, "and under circumstances like these, I could be content to return again to the drudgery of my humble occupation, and would leave to time and my own conduct the result. With the opportunity, I could reinstate myself and correct the false impressions which are so unfortunately connected with my name. But I cannot starve, dear Alice—powerful, vengeful enemies (whom you do not dream of) pursue me, and I must leave the scene which has now become so burthensome to me."

"You have decided, Henry?"

"I have, dearest. Far away, I know not whither, but far aloof from this place, in some location where I am unknown, but where industry and a devoted application of the little talent Heaven has blessed me with, may find encouragement; some turn in fortune's wheel may favour me, and I may find the opportunity to reclaim my lost ground. Alice, we are young. I have health, spirits, strength, acquirements; abroad, I may do what I cannot do here, and the time will come when I shall be able, peradventure, to look my rivals and opponents in the face, with something besides the consciousness of being an honest man!

"You, Alice, will be faithful; you will cherish the recollection of our happier days; you will not forget that Henry Darling exists, and that he exists alone for Alice Durand! A long, an arduous, a trying scene is before him; but if he can encounter the venture, cheered by the assurance that Alice still loves him, that she will adhere to her vow, and that she will bide the events of the few years which come between her and—and *her promise to Lord Ermont!*—the task will be light, the labour will be performed cheerfully and earnestly; this parting, even, will be softened, and Darling will meet the trial with hope and confidence."

The feelings of Harry mastered him, and he faltered as Alice replied:

"Henry, your Alice would now be brave—she would endeavour to show you how she appreciates your self-sacrifice, how she applauds your determination, how firmly her fate is linked to yours, how deeply, fervently she loves you. But the trial is too great for her young heart;

this moment of parting, after our long promise of happiness, is too much, and her spirit sinks.

"Henry, the haughty Lord Ermont, who would *purchase* the hand of Alice Durand, *may* peradventure obtain the hand—but he will take the hand without a heart. Three years of probation stand between us. A thousand scenes must transpire in that long lapse of time, and the only pledge which has been given him is the hand of Alice, in the event of a final forfeiture of my father's bond. He does not believe the debt can be liquidated, and if it be not paid—our honour, Henry, is pledged!

"But fortune will smile on us. You will succeed; my father is not too old to labour yet—he will lend his aid, and Alice will have an object to toil for. Go, then, Henry. I can bide the issue; you see—I am—firm! We shall hear from you very often, you will be prospered—you will return again, and—we shall yet—be happy."

But the words stuck in her throat, and the tender-hearted girl sunk on her lover's bosom, giving way to a torrent of tears.

The parting moment came at last. It indeed, under the circumstances, was a courage which Darling scarcely possessed, to pronounce the final farewell—but it came. An absence of years was before him, and all was uncertainty. He might or might not be successful, and despite all his philosophy and endeavours to the contrary, heavy thoughts pressed on his heart. The final embrace was exchanged, and Harry rose to depart.

"Farewell," he said, "Alice, a long farewell! I go content with the kind assurances you have given me, and never fear but that all will yet be well. I shall return with honour, with a character fully redeemed from the unjust stigma which now rests on my name. You will hear of my success, the time will not be long, we shall meet again. The homestead shall be saved, Alice, we shall be happy yet. Heaven bless you—farewell!" And pressing a last kiss on her lips, he left the dwelling with a troubled heart.

As he passed the gate, he met the father of Alice. Seizing the old man's hand, he tarried but a moment to bid him "adieu."

"Farewell, father," he said. "Alice is weeping, see to her—comfort her—encourage her. She will need your good counsel. But we shall meet again, sir; the storm must pass, and Henry Darling will yet return to shame his enemies. The house shall be saved, sir—the honour of Henry Darling is at stake. The bond shall be paid. Adieu!"

Harry wrote a hasty epistle to his foster-parents, in which he merely hinted that he left town upon business which promised better success abroad, and that he should be some time absent. Harry deposited this in the post; he was soon afterwards on the road to Exeter, *en route* to London. He had determined to proceed at once to the metropolis, where he was a total stranger, but where he believed that his knowledge of his profession would readily make way for him. In two years, he thought, with strict economy and a fair opportunity, he should be able to lay up the four hundred pounds he owed Durand, and his first aim would be to discharge the lien upon his estate, which had been put under bond solely for his own accommodation.

For the first time in her life, Alice Durand felt that she was now *alone*, as she sat weeping in the little parlour after Harry had departed. Her father entered the room and endeavoured to console his faithful daughter, whose happiness was near his heart, and for whom he felt a deep concern in every act of his life.

"Harry is innocent, daughter—but he is a brave youth and a good workman. He will return to us by-and-bye—he will come back to triumph over those who would crush him; the cottage will be saved, Alice; and in spite of his 'noble lordship,' I shall yet see Darling my son-in-law!"

The encouraging words of her father relieved the mind of Alice, and though the task was a difficult one, she dried her tears, and looked forward with ardent hope to the future.

CHAPTER IX.

HARRY'S TRIP TO LONDON.

"———It was a bold stroke
And well-timed, sir.—You lay me
Under obligation deep, which I will
Well repay, hereafter." * *

"Surely, we have met before!"

A TEDIOUS journey was Darling's trip to London, and several days had elapsed ere he arrived at the great British metropolis. On the morning after he reached his present destination, he set about seeking employment at the best establishments in London, but he found himself a total stranger, and a week had passed—the contents of his lightly-filled purse had already given way, but as yet, no prospect of an engagement presented itself. The lack of friends to commend him, or to whom he could refer, prevented his obtaining employment as he desired, his profession being one of important trust, at times, and the world, especially the London "world," is suspicious.

The night of the eighth day after his arrival came round. Darling had assiduously employed the previous twelve hours in searching among the jewellers and dealers, and tradesmen in precious stones, for a situation, but to no purpose. The house of Rubey & Co., York Street—a fashionable and very extensive concern—chanced to be in want of a good workman, but the situation offered was of great responsibility, and the emolument was lucrative. But Darling could offer no references in town. He gave the name of the house of Farquand, but it was too far distant to avail of, at once—and poor Harry, disappointed

and annoyed at his ill success, slowly wended his way toward his lodgings, with a heavy heart.

As he approached his hotel, the heavy tongue of St. Paul's church struck the hour of ten o'clock evening. He was passing on leisurely through the retired street which led to his temporary home, when a solitary figure came up hurriedly at his side, just as he reached the gas-light which blazed from the city lamp at the corner of a cross-street. The stranger was muffled to the throat in a heavy pea-coat, and as they reached the crossing he halted.

"What is the hour?" he asked of Harry, as he passed him.

"St. Paul's has just chimed ten, sir."

"I think I am in the route to 'White Fawn' Inn?"

"You are right, sir; it is scarce three hundred yards hence, on the left."

The stranger hurried on, and Harry quickened his gait somewhat, though the pace of the former left Darling behind. Harry was bound to the same hotel, but the gentleman pushed hurriedly forward and our hero found himself a few rods in the rear, when he suddenly noticed the stranger in conflict with three stout men, who had sprung upon him unawares, from out a dark alley leading into the main street. A blow from a bludgeon in the hands of one of the assailants brought the traveller to the earth.

Thinking more of the unfair advantage thus taken by three ruffians towards a single man, than of his own probable chances, or the merits of the quarrel, and fortunately carrying in his hand a heavy cane, Darling sprang forward to the scene, and, with a well-directed blow, laid the foremost of the gang helpless at his feet. The stranger had recovered from his fall, and arose for a struggle as Harry came up. A knife gleamed over his head as he came to his feet, but another blow from Darling's stout stick staggered the ruffian to the pavement, just as the weapon was about to fall upon the unoffending stranger. The latter closed with the third, and threw him violently to the ground.

The others, finding themselves unexpectedly in contact with so powerful an adversary, calculated the chances evidently, gathered themselves up and escaped—the last one following with rapid strides upon the retreating footsteps of his companions, a moment afterward, ere he could be secured.

"By Jove, sir!" exclaimed the stranger, addressing himself to Darling, "that cane of yours did me right good service, my friend—for friend you have been, surely—and your aid arrived at just about the right time, I fancy."

"Are you hurt, sir?" inquired Harry, as the other took his hand.

"No, not much, I think—though I believe the rascal pricked me as I fell."

"Let us hurry on, sir. I am quartered at the 'White Fawn' myself, for the time being, and am happy in thus having the opportunity to serve a fellow-lodger. I think you said you were bound thither?"

"Yes, I arrived in town to-day, and having been delayed below a little in consummating some business, I stepped in at the Café Francais

to procure a cup of chocolate, and found myself without a sixpence of change in my purse. I was forced to produce a *roleau* of bank notes, and observed a hang-dog looking trio of knaves at my side, who followed me out. But, for your timely succour, I should have been a thousand pounds poorer at this moment, to say nothing of the chances for a broken skull or a little blood-letting."

"The service was trifling, sir, but I am glad that the aid came so opportunely."

They reached the inn and parted at the outer door, the stranger passing immediately to his room, to examine his wound. Darling entered the reception-room of the hotel, and as they separated, the gentleman apologized to Harry for his abruptness at parting, but invited him cordially to his apartment "No. 33, White Fawn," at his leisure. Upon looking over the register, Darling discovered the name of Harmon among the late arrivals.

"Who is this?" he inquired of the clerk.

"Captain Harmon, late of Beresford, sir."

"When did he arrive?"

"At noon, sir."

"His number?"

"Thirty-three, first flight, front, sir."

Harry begged to be shown at once to his apartment, where he found his old friend, Captain Harmon, the owner of the lost bracelets, whom he had not recognized, but who was overjoyed to meet him, more especially when he learned that the young jeweller had been his preserver in the late conflict.

The captain had come to London upon business, and the object of Darling was soon related to him. He informed the captain of the condition he found himself in, in the metropolis, without friends, and the aid of his old acquaintance was readily proffered.

"Our meeting," he said, was most fortunate, Darling, and I am indebted to you for an essential service to-night, which I shall lose no time in repaying, I assure you."

He then inquired intimately into the affairs of Darling, whom he had not seen for some time, and finally learned from him that he had been tarrying in London over a week, but thus far had been unable to complete any engagement. He also informed him that the establishment of Rubey & Co. had offered him some encouragement until that day, but his lack of city references had prevented him from closing with them, and when they met, he was on his way from that house, where he had been finally disappointed.

"Give yourself no further uneasiness, Darling, on this point," continued the captain. "I have had occasion to transact business with this firm, and know the house well. In the morning I will see that you secure a place with them, if you so desire. It is a responsible and flourishing concern, and I can assure you an opportunity there. Consider this matter settled, sir, and command me or my purse, if you need further aid."

This well-timed and noble generosity on the part of the kind-hearted Captain Harmon entirely overcame the better nature of our hero. The

wound of his friend proved to be but a slight puncture in the arm, though it bled very freely, and after an hour's conversation, Darling left the captain very comfortable, and retired to his own room with a lightened heart. The robbers were never known, but Captain Harmon well knew that he had to thank his own lucky stars, and the promptness of the young jeweller, for his lucky escape. The first business of Captain Harmon on the following morning was to wait upon the firm of Rubey & Co., with whom he was well acquainted. He was fortunate in finding the senior of the house at leisure.

"My young friend, Mr Darling, tells me he is in negotiation with you for a place here," said the captain, coming at once to the object of his visit.

"Yes. A young man calling himself Darling, from one of the southern countries, I think he said, has applied to us, and we are really in need of the services of a competent person just now; but you know, captain, the responsibility of our employées is oftentimes very great, and this person could offer us no reference which we could avail of."

"No, he is a stranger here. But I know him thoroughly. He is an honest man—his late employer gave him a most excellent character, but a little time since when I had occasion to employ him in a trusty business; and while it will be serving him and yourselves, I shall deem it a personal favour, if he can have a trial with you."

"He may be trusted?"

"For his unqualified integrity, I pledge myself to you; and I will very willingly enter into any amount of bonds you may require for his faithfulness and honesty. His capacities, too, are said to be excellent, and those who know him call him a master of his vocation. I know his history, and he has been unfortunate in trade."

"From any fault of his own?"

"I *know* his misfortune to have been caused by circumstances entirely beyond his control."

"This is well."

"You will find him, I believe, a good workman, and an honest, upright man."

"Shall you see him soon, captain?"—"Within the hour."

"Say to Mr Darling that we are perfectly satisfied with your representations in regard to him, and we shall be glad if he can find it convenient to commence with us at once."

The captain departed, and very soon communicated the result of his interview with Rubey & Co. to his anxious friend, who awaited him, and who was much gratified with the intelligence that the vacancy had been secured for him. He promised to wait upon the firm on the following day, and really felt grateful for this unlooked-for aid.

"My dear Captain Harmon," said Harry, "you do not know the load of embarrassment and trouble you have lifted from my heart by this unexpected act of kindness; but be assured it is appreciated, and the time will come when I shall be able to repay you for this and other services you have rendered me, and for which I hold myself deeply your debtor."

"No, Darling, I would not have you deem it thus. You saved my life, perhaps, last night, at least you did my purse, and I tell you I am *your* debtor yet. But be prudent and careful with Rubey & Co., and your fortune is made, in time."

"I shall endeavour to be faithful, captain."

"I know you will, else I would not have commended you to so responsible a place as that you will occupy there. I shall remain in town but a day or two, but I shall meet you here from time to time, for business calls me frequently to the metropolis. Keep a bright look-out in your new situation. I shall always find you when I come to London, and I shall be most happy to hear of your success with Rubey & Co. If you ever stand in need of aid, however, don't fail to call upon me unhesitatingly. I tell you again, I feel myself largely your debtor."

The friends shook hands and separated. Harmon made no allusion to the lost jewels; he saw the position Darling was in, striving to bear himself up against his hard fortune, and had he not rendered him the aid which saved him from serious injury and robbery, he had no disposition to name the loss which he had experienced in a previous transaction with his young friend.

On the following morning Darling made his necessary household arrangements, and at an early hour presented himself at the elegant store of Rubey & Co., York Street, where he was very soon installed. His new employers received him very warmly, and they spoke in high terms of praise of his friend, Captain Harmon. In a little time our self-exiled artisan found himself comfortably situated at his new quarters in one of the first establishments in London, with a prospect once more of rising to a position of respectability.

Darling became a favourite with Rubey & Co.; his superior workmanship very shortly carved the way for him to the most intricate and profitable kinds of work, and his employers soon ascertained that the skill of their new operative was entirely superior to that of any one they had ever employed.

Fairly established in his new position, his thoughts naturally turned towards those he had left far away from him, and one evening he devoted a leisure hour to the penning of a lengthy epistle to Alice, and at the same time addressed a note to her parent and his foster-father; the letters were mailed but they never reached their intended destination. The machinations of Lord Ermont were at work, and upon the arrival of these communications at Plymouth, they found their way into his lordship's hands at once, who learned of Darling's whereabouts, and his prospects.

Harry had no means of ascertaining this fraud, and so he toiled on patiently to the end of a month, and another—awaiting replies, which did not come! His success in business had been complete, but three months had passed, and he had written several letters, to which he had received no response; and he finally became uneasy, and conjured up in his mind a variety of speculations to account for the fact, little dreaming that his favours never reached his friends, who had already become uneasy in regard to his fate.

CHAPTER X.

LORD ERMONT AND THE DURANDS.

"He was a subtle knave, and ever deemed
The end to be obtained would justify
The means! Deceit was in his heart,
And sordid selfishness marked all
His acts."

Occasionally Lord Ermont had contrived to throw himself in Durand's path, and two or three times he had succeeded in meeting Alice, to whom he was most devoted in his attentions. She treated the proud lord with cold but passive reserve, but had no idea of the villany he had practised towards her, in gaining possession of the letters sent her by Darling. Time slipped away, and six months had now expired since the evening of her last interview with Darling, the night he left for London. Alice sat in the little parlour with her father, and already the healthful glow which was so wont to brighten her sweet face had given way to a paler tinge, occasioned by a secret grief which she could not avoid, at the seeming neglect of him in whom were centred all her hopes of future happiness.

Her father had noted this change, and could not but feel a deep concern for his loved daughter's health. He had zealously endeavoured constantly to encourage her with the idea that Darling was doing well, and contended that his apparent neglect was but the precursor to some agreeable surprise which he doubted not Harry had in contemplation for them, though his mind in fact misgave him, when he reflected that no intelligence had been received from him for so long a period. Lord Ermont became possessed of a third—a fourth letter from Darling, addressed to Alice; nearly a year had gone by, and he at length attempted to destroy the hopes of the lover, by venturing a reply!

Darling had returned to his lodgings one evening after a tedious day's toil, and as he passed to his room, the clerk handed him a letter postmarked "Plymouth," and addressed in a delicate hand to "Henry Darling, White Fawn Inn, London." He repaired in haste to his room, where he broke the seal, and read as follows:—

Plymouth, Dev. Co., April 18—

"My dear Sir,—Nearly a twelvemonth has expired since you left us—under circumstances which it is hardly necessary that I should remind you of. You will do me the justice to admit that when I parted with you, I had not the remotest knowledge of the details of the facts connected with the mysterious disappearance of the jewels, which caused your downfall here. I believed you innocent of any participation in their loss—I trust, even now, that your conscience may not smite

you at the perusal of these lines; but you best know if you be free from any guilt concerning those valuable bracelets, the loss of which has been the cause of deep sorrow to your friends here, and possibly your eventual destruction. Unimpeachable authority points to yourself as accessory to the purloining—and bitter indeed have been the pangs of those who once loved you, at this awful suspicion.

"Your several letters have duly reached me, from time to time—and during the sad months which have passed away since we met, since those letters first commenced to find me—you can never know the heartfelt sorrow, the pain I have experienced, pending a period fraught with so much of life-interest to myself. In vain have I striven to find a plea for you, in vain have I delayed penning these lines—the first, but the last you will ever receive from me; in vain have I sought for excuses that might palliate the dishonour. You have brought the misery upon your own head—upon hers who loved you fondly—upon his who befriended you, when none other stood ready to lend you a helping hand!

"O Darling, what had *I* done to be made an apparent participator in this foul wrong—for the name of Alice Durand has been cavalierly connected with yours in this deceit?—what *had* I done, to prompt you to the forgetfulness which must so plainly have led to your ruin and mine? But I have no heart to criminate; my duty to you, to my aged parent, to myself—calls upon me to say briefly what I have now to add, and which I do with a trembling hand and an aching heart.

"We must not meet again! The die is cast, Henry. Your own unworthy act has hurried me to the course I have chosen—ay, Darling, *chosen*, under the circumstances, and no alternative is left me. The bond we cannot meet; a year has expired, and the prospect is densely darker than a year ago; I have pledged, anew, to Lord Ermont—my hand and heart! You have no further claim upon the affections you have so indiscreetly abused; you never loved me as you protested, or you could not thus have forgotten your own reputation, which should have been dear to you as your heart-strings!

"Accompanying this I return you your letters. They breathe a devotedness which is well dissembled, but even though it break her heart, with this must cease all communication between you and your once devoted, injured

ALICE."

As he finished this appalling missive, a servant knocked at the door of his room, and entering, without a response, he placed a small parcel upon the table, without the notice of Darling, whose eyes were rivetted upon the letter, and whose face was lividly pale.

"Are you ill, sir?" asked the servant, noting the strange appearance of Harry.

"No, John, nothing. Leave me!" said Darling. And a moment afterwards a deep sigh escaped him, as he placed his hand upon the packet just brought out by the attendant, which he opened, and found to be his own letters to Alice Durand, returned to him as had been hinted in the letter which he had just finished reading.

"Good God!" he exclaimd, at length, "have I been left for this?"

But a flood of tears came to his relief, and he again perused the communication which had for a few moments almost bereft him of reason.

He was not acquainted with the handwriting of Alice, for he had never occasion to note it particularly; yet, he had no thought that this was a base forgery! His own letters had come back, all he had written, in the same condition he had sent them; the circumstances of his parting with Alice, her ignorance in reference to the particulars regarding the lost bracelets, all conspired to render the matter straightforward and certain; and the unhappy Darling was well-nigh distracted.

Lord Ermont considered this piece of knavery a master-stroke of policy! He imagined that he knew the character and disposition of Darling, and fancied that his proud spirit could never brook so cold and heartless an act as this, at the hands of one whom the nobleman well knew he doted upon most fondly. By returning Darling's letters to him at the same time, too, he believed the deception would be rendered complete, and that the artisan would thus be driven from the field. He had already become satisfied that a desperate game must be played, if he would win, and anxiously did he watch for the returning post which might bear a reply from the abused and suffering lover.

The grief which followed upon Darling's re-perusal of this almost fatal letter was most intense, yet our hero determined upon answering it. Faint hope was left him, but he desired to vindicate himself with Alice against the foul aspersion to which she had alluded (as he thought), and on the following day, he sat down and addressed her the following reply, with a heart writhing with sadness :—

"White Fawn Inn, London, May, 18—.

"DEARLY LOVED ALICE,—Could the bleeding heart of him who still adores you be bared to your sight, you would pity, at least, the victim of your unjust and unkind suspicions. Your letter found me here yesterday, after an absence of a year from the companionship of all I hold dear in life. Ignorant as I was of the cause of delay to the answering of my repeated letters, you can well judge of the lasting misery which your terribly chilling communication must have caused me! In the midst of all my sufferings, my voluntary exile from yourself, and my continued misfortunes, I had fondly clung to the remembrance of your kindness, and deemed myself secure, at least in your affections. Bitterly have I learned my error!

"And you, Alice, believe me guilty of the commission of a dishonourable act! You, in whom I have so fondly trusted, so undeviatingly confided! You have suffered the tongue of scandal to influence you, and my good name—which I have ever prized beyond all earthly considerations, save your love—is impeached in the estimation of her I had hoped to call by the name of wife. I can scarcely realise this assumption, and I have no means to refute the foul scandal, save the entire protestation of my innocence!

"Well might I claim your lenity, Alice—well might I ask you to suspend your judgment against me—well might I reiterate to you, that time will show how unjustly I am defamed. But your cold and formal missive, the returning of my passionate but honest letters, your

avowed determination to desert me in my affliction, all came upon me not to importune you, not to annoy you, even with a syllable of self-justification—for I would not willingly add one pang of sorrow to the heart of her whose esteem I prize so highly—and I will only repeat again that I am innocent.

"Enclosed you will find a draft for two hundred pounds. It is payable to the order of your father; please let him place the amount to my credit (upon the bond), and believe me that I have now but the wish that I may live long enough to cancel the remainder of my pecuniary indebtedness to him, to meet you once more, and to know that you are happy—happy, Alice, in the love of one more worthy than your unfortunate friend, HENRY DARLING."

Darling had managed, by dint of rigid economy and constant toil, to lay aside the sum named in his letter. He procured a draft, enclosed it to the address of Alice, deposited it in the mail, and believed that this would be the last time he should have occasion, at present, to communicate with one upon whom he had lavished his first and only affections. In due course of time the parcel reached its destination, and promptly found its way into the hands of the watchful emissary of his lordship, who had been for some days on the *qui vive*—anticipating an answer to the forged letter.

Lord Ermont deposited the draft in a private drawer of his escritoire, but he was not content with the tone of this letter from Darling, and he suddenly conceived a fear, notwithstanding the apparent independence which characterized the communication, that the lover, in his desperation, might conclude to return to Plymouth to vindicate himself in the eyes of Alice—and he now regretted the course he had taken. The non-presentation of the draft, too, he fancied might lead to a crisis which he had not calculated upon—and having relatives and estates in London which occasionally required his presence there, he determined at once to repair to the metropolis, and to shape his movements there with a view effectually to destroy his young rival, who had no thought of his lordship's designs, or of his participation in this foul piece of knavery.

Alice and her father now sat in the little room where so many happy hours had passed between the lovers in days gone by.

"His long silence, father," said Alice, "is inexplicable, and I confess to you that I have for weeks entertained fears that we shall never see him again."

"Do not despair, daughter. I repeat to you my own belief that he will return to us with honour, and when we least anticipate him."

"I would *I* could think thus."

"Cheer up, Alice. All will come right. We have done well the past year, and already, with your own little means, we can count out to his lordship a full half of his due, in honestly earned coin, at any moment. But a twelvemonth has elapsed yet, and certainly this is encouraging, eh?"

"Yes, father—the estate may be saved—but poor Henry! If we could only hear that he is well."

"Patience, daughter, all will end well."

"I hope so, father," replied Alice—but her thoughts were wandering, and she could not drive from her heart the conviction of coming evil.

On the next day after the reception of Darling's last letter, Lord Ermont had made his arrangements, and having secured a post-chaise, he invited his niece, Miss Ella Erhenart, to accompany him, and proceeded up to London immediately. By means of Harry's letter he had learned his exact position, address, and employment, and his lordship was well acquainted with the wealthy house of Rubey & Co. He determined to take early measures, after arriving in London, to drop a hint in that quarter which should have the effect of breaking up Darling's connection with the establishment, and thus force the artisan to seek elsewhere a livelihood, which would aid in filling up the term of time yet unexpired between the present and his future hopes with Alice Durand. In a few days his lordship arrived safe at the metropolis.

CHAPTER XI.

THE INFLUENCE OF LORD ERMONT.

"Who steals my purse, steals trash. 'Twas mine,
'Tis his—and has been slave to thousands.
But he who filches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And makes me poor indeed!"

The family connections of Lord Ermont in the city of London were generally wealthy, and for years had been amongst the foremost patrons of the fashionable establishment of Rubey & Co., York Street. Though Lord Ermont expended very little money at such places himself, his influence was valuable, he was well-known, and his friendship was of consequence to the firm. He had been in London but three days, when he presented himself, with his customary patronising air, at the jeweller's store, where he was very warmly welcomed. A crest of brilliants curiously and exquisitely set attracted the notice of his lordship during his visit there, and he was informed by the senior of the firm that they were indebted to the skill of a new artisan for the tasteful display of the rich jewels—a young man of very rare talents in his way.

"His name?" asked Lord Ermont, carelessly.

"Darling, my lord. By the way, from Devonshire county, too; you may have heard of him."

"Henry Darling?"

"The same."

"In London about a year, I think?"

"Some thirteen months."

"He is a young man?"

"About twenty-three."

"From Plymouth?" said his lordship.

"You know him, then."

"No—that is, I have heard of him."

"He is a most excellent workman, and—"

"I have heard so. But if I remember rightly—however, it will scarcely be well to name it—but rumour spoke ill of the Darling to whom *I* allude."

"Your lordship may do us a service by explaining."

"O no—I wouldn't harm the young man—this may not be the same, probably is not."

"But my Lord Ermont is not aware that we oftentimes have occasion to entrust the most valuable property entirely to the custody, temporarily, of these workmen—and if any stain exist upon the character of this man, your lordship's visit here to-day is most opportune, for an important piece of work would have been placed in the hands of Darling to-morrow, which could be risked only with one in whom we may implicitly rely."

"It is not my province, sir, to assail private characters. Under the circumstances, however, my long acquaintance with the firm of Rubey & Co. will justify me in venturing the information that there was a Darling in Plymouth, some years ago, who was entrusted with a valuable set of jewelled bracelets, for sale, who suddenly *lost* them (so he pretended), and also became a bankrupt there by the accident. He left the place very soon afterwards, and I had heard he came to London. This may be another person, you know."

"Our operative referred us to the house of Farquand, I remember—with whom I think he served his apprenticeship."

"It is the same, sir."

"Can it be possible?"

"You may easily ascertain."

"We are deeply indebted to your lordship for this kindness," said the obsequious jeweller, as he bowed the nobleman to his carriage.

The career of Darling with Rubey & Co. was nearly finished!

Miss Ella Erhenart, the proud niece of Lord Ermont, had very readily availed herself of her uncle's invitation to accompany him to London. She had a twofold reason for this, which she did not explain; but she was very glad to pass a few days at the metropolis in the fashionable "season;" she therefore accepted his proposal, and joined him in the excursion. She had not seen Darling for a long period, and no tidings having been received from him at Plymouth for upwards of a year, it was generally believed by his enemies (and feared, too, in a measure by his friends), that he had ceased to exist. A rumour had been put in circulation even, some six months before, through the agency of Lord Ermont, that Darling had committed suicide. So far as Miss Ella was concerned, he was believed to be dead.

It was no part of Lord Ermont's policy to mention Darling's name oftener than he was forced to, and his niece had no intimation, after

her arrival in London, that the jeweller she had become enamoured of more than two years before, was now located within half-a-dozen squares of her uncle's town quarters! She believed that the affair of the bracelets was her own secret solely, and deeming the opportunity a good one, she had no hesitation in taking such measures as she believed would entirely and for ever free her from any chance of implication in the abstraction, provided that any suspicion should have originally attached to her—which she did not in fact believe.

The innuendoes and hints thrown out by Lord Ermont in regard to Darling's previous character seriously affected the disposition of the young mechanic's principal employer, though he deeply regretted the course which he now felt compelled to pursue at once. He therefore laid the subject before the firm, and it was unanimously and promptly decided by the Messrs. Rubey & Co. that it would be unsafe longer to retain Harry in their employ; and the same evening, following this decision, he was summoned abruptly to an interview with the partners. Darling answered the call, little dreaming what was in store for him that night!

"You need scarcely be reminded, Mr Darling," said the chief of the concern, stiffly—"that in a business like ours it is an imperative matter that we have about us operatives in whose honesty and integrity we may implicitly rely."

"I am fully aware of this, sir," replied Harry, a little disturbed, but not knowing exactly whether this was the precursor to a compliment to his character or not.

"You came to us very highly commended by a man in whom we should confide."

"I think, sir, in the twelvemonth and more since I entered into your service, that you have had good opportunity to test my character. I trust you have ever found me faithful and worthy your confidence."

"Yes—yes. We have never had any occasion to doubt you, personally—and—but—I think you informed us you were brought up with the house of Farquand. Am I right?"

"You are, sir."

"You are acquainted, perhaps, with Lord Ermont?"

"Lord Ermont!" said Darling, with some confusion—for the name startled him, he knew not why.

"Yes, his lordship is a very good friend of ours."

"Lord Ermont is no friend to Henry Darling, sir, I fear."

"You do know him, then?"

"Yes, sir. That is, I have seen him."

"He appears to be better acquainted with your history than your friend Captain Harmon."

"Well, sir," continued Darling, proudly.

"Well—to make this painful interview as brief as possible, for, after our somewhat lengthy acquaintance, and in consideration of your valuable services thus far, it is painful for us to be obliged to say it—we have to inquire if you remember the loss of a valuable set of bracelets, left in your charge some years ago?"

"I had supposed you were coming to this, sir, and I have only to

reply that I do recollect that matter most vividly. I have had good reason to do so; and, in return, I would ask if my integrity has been brought into question by Lord Ermont in connection with that unfortunate affair?"

"We have no disposition to implicate his lordship in any scandal, sir; but we are satisfied ourselves that your course has not been, heretofore, such as an honest man would pursue, and we cannot suffer ourselves to be put in jeopardy by encouraging you further. Your account is balanced, sir—the cashier will pay you what remains to your credit. We can only add that we have no further call for your services."

"Had the opportunity been given me, gentlemen, I could have satisfied you that I had pursued an honourable deportment in the matter you have spoken of, and that thus far in life I have ever striven to maintain a course of honesty. But you refuse me such opportunity."

"We cannot risk the favour of those to whom we are indebted for business, Mr Darling," continued the wealthy jeweller, whose mind was evidently made up beforehand; "and it would hardly be worth our while to be troubled about a subject in which we can now have no possible interest."

"You have so decided?"

"We have, sir."

"I trust, then, gentlemen—since you have neither the leisure, nor perhaps the inclination, to be troubled with explanations, that if I am fortunate enough to procure another situation, you will at least speak well of my course since I have been in your employ?"

"We have no fault to find with you, personally, but we could hardly recommend a person to others in our profession whom we could not conscientiously retain in our own establishment."

"You may ruin me, thus!" continued Harry, distressed with this new and unexpected treatment.

"We shall not go out of our province to speak of you, Mr Darling. The world is before you—you have a goodly share of talent in your profession—and we can only express the hope that you may do well."

The interview was ended. Darling waited upon the cashier, took leave of his companions, bade his principals good-night, and with a depressed heart departed toward his lodgings!

It was a dreary evening, and the clock in St. Paul's had tolled ten ere he emerged into the street which led into the White Fawn Inn. A heavy rain had been falling for an hour, and the shower was accompanied by thunder and sharp flashes of lightning. Darling hurried along towards his hotel, and though his mind was busy with oppressive thoughts, his attention was suddenly arrested by the rattling of heavy carriage wheels dashing towards him, and a continual shrieking in the distance.

Turning about, he discovered a pair of fiery horses before an elegant close vehicle, dashing down the street at a furious pace, without a driver. The occupant of the carriage, fastened in, was utterly unable to extricate himself, and he shrieked for aid; but though several attempts had been made by the passers by, the animals, who had been

frightened by the storm, still kept on their course, madly whirling away with the burden behind them! The alarmed horses plunged from side to side, threatening at every leap to upset and dash the carriage to atoms, the long reins dangling at their side, and the gentleman inside exposed to the most desperate peril.

On came the steeds—they neared the spot where Darling stood, he saw a fellow-being in danger, and forgetting his own risk of life or limb, he sprang from the walk, seized the loose reins, and with a powerful effort arrested the fiery animals in their mad career. He clung to the lines, but the affrighted beasts still reared and plunged with frantic terror, now bounding forward, now leaping from one walk to the other, until the nigh horse reared and fell. Darling lost his foothold at this moment, the struggling animals drew the carriage directly over him, the crowd secured the horses, but the unfortunate jeweller was taken up senseless, his face and head covered with blood.

Darling was borne into the nearest shop, and being recognized by a gentleman in the throng, a surgeon was sent for, and he was immediately taken to his lodgings, but a few rods distant from the scene of the accident. The gentleman who occupied the carriage was released at the earliest possible moment, the driver, from whom the animals had escaped (at the moment he was about to mount the box), came up, the horses and harnesses were readjusted, and just as the vehicle was about to move off again, a stranger in the crowd suggested to the occupant that the man who had arrested his horses, and who had thus probably saved his life, had been badly hurt in stopping them. The *generous* stranger handed the speaker a five pound note for the benefit of the injured man, and inquired what the name of the sufferer was.

"It's Harry Darling, sir—as brave a fellow and as good-hearted a man as can be found in London!"

"Go on, driver!" shouted the gentleman to the coachee—and the vehicle was very shortly out of sight!

"Darling is about done for," said one.

"What did the man give you?" inquired another.

"Five pounds."

"Liberal, very!"

"As liberal as could be expected."

"How?"

"Do you know who that is?"—"No."

"Why, it's Lord Ermont—one of the wealthiest and meanest men in England!"

The crowd dispersed, the surgeon arrived, and upon examining Harry's wounds—pronounced them fatal! Within an hour after the accident, Lord Ermont had secretly employed a spy to proceed to Darling's lodgings, for the purpose of ascertaining if he was dangerously injured, who subsequently reported to his lordship that he had conversed with the surgeon who attended him, and who pronounced his case a hopeless one. Darling had remained entirely unconscious of his condition from the moment he was taken up, and it was believed that his skull was fractured.

The feelings of rivalry entertained by Lord Ermont towards Darling were ripened for anything. He was scarcely equal to the task of murdering him, it is true—but should his death occur from this accident, he would surely be out of *his* way—and who can help accidents? Thus did the heartless Ermont reason with himself; and meantime he employed a menial to be in attendance about the hotel where Darling lay, who was required to report to him constantly the chances of his life or death!

CHAPTER XII.

MISHAP OF DARLING, AND HIS DANGEROUS ILLNESS.

——— "The secret's out!
And yet contrived with care it was.
But guilt will ofttimes hang itself,
Give it but length of rope."

CAPTAIN HARMON had been absent in the north of England over a year. On the second day after the occurrence of the accident by which Darling had been so seriously injured, he reached London, on his way to Devonshire county, where he had taken up his residence permanently. Upon his arrival at the White Fawn, his first inquiry was for his young friend. Upon learning the sad intelligence, he repaired at once to the chamber of Darling, and after consultation with his attendant, was admitted. During the day previously, Harry had revived somewhat, and had now entirely recovered his consciousness. Additional medical attendance was instantly called by Captain Harmon, who was well known in the hotel, and who directed that nothing should be spared which money could purchase for his friend's comfort and convenience.

Faithful nurses were called in, who attended the bedside of the sufferer night and day, and it was soon ascertained that the injuries Darling had encountered were no longer of an alarming character, though he had been very badly bruised, and a frightful contusion was open on his head. But kindness and care soon brought about a radical change in him, and a month after the mishap, he was decidedly on the mending hand. The attentions of the captain had been entirely absorbed with his friend, and he had had no leisure as yet to call upon his old acquaintances Rubey & Co., who had so unceremoniously parted with Darling's services in his absence; but the latter having now got quite strong again, comparatively—felt desirous that Captain Harmon should call upon them and explain the matter of the bracelets, and thirty days after Darling left the house of Rubey & Co., Captain Harmon entered the store.

After the passing of a few compliments, the conversation turned upon Darling.

"He has been badly used in more ways than one, I find," said the captain—"since I left him here a year ago."

"I regretted exceedingly," said the senior Mr Rubey, "to hear of the accident which befell him—and on the very night, too, that he left us. He is better now, I learn."

"He is doing very well—but it will be a long time ere he will get out again. You discharged him from your employment, he tells me."

"We parted with Darling—because we were compelled to do so, captain."

"Compelled?"

"Yes. Lord Ermont—a gentleman whom you know by reputation, at least, captain—gave us some information touching Darling's character and history, previous to his coming to London, which obliged us to let him go, under circumstances which we much regretted."

"I do not know Lord Ermont. I have never seen him, to my knowledge, though I have heard his name before. It was Lord Ermont's carriage that injured Darling, I hear; in the attempt to stop his runaway horses, the young man saved his lordship's life, and well nigh lost his own. But what did he charge my friend with?"

"O—nothing—nothing—positively. But rather implicated him in the loss, in some way, of a valuable pair of bracelets—which Darling had in his possession for sale, I believe."

"The bracelets were stolen from the counter."

"I know nothing of the details, captain."

"But I do, sir."

"You, captain?"

"Yes, sir. The bracelets were mine. I brought them out from India myself, placed them in Darling's charge to dispose of, and again, I repeat, they were stolen."

"This is very singular."

"Not more strange than true. I know of what I speak, and Darling is defamed. I am ready to stake my life for his honesty."

The earnestness of Captain Harmon's manner moved the merchant, and he continued:

"We had to regret Darling's absence the more deeply, from the fact that his skill as a workman is altogether unrivalled, in our experience—and but the day before he left us, an important piece of work came in, which none but an artist could perform. The order still remains in our hands, and we have as yet been unable to find a man competent to execute the task."

"You have always found Darling faithful?"

"Strictly so, captain. But you know how we are situated, and upon whom we depend for support in our business. Lord Ermont has character, influence, and station; we could not overlook the hints he gave us in regard to young Darling. Moreover, the very order I have just been speaking of—the modernising and resetting of some highly valuable brilliants—was given us by a young lady, from one of the southern countries, a relative of his, who is also a person of great wealth and high character. The bracelets are old fashioned, but the stones are excellent diamonds of high cost, and we could not run a

risk, you know. Here are the ornaments I speak of,"—saying which, Mr Rubey turned to his safe, and placed before the thunderstruck vision of Captain Harmon—his own bracelets!

"Good God! Rubey—Mr Rubey, I mean—where did those bracelets come from?"

"What is the matter, captain?"

"The bracelets, Mr Rubey—how came they in your hands? They are mine—I could swear to them."

"Yours?"

"Mine, sir."

"Were those you lost never discovered?"

"Never!"

"You astound me."

"I state truth to you, on my honour—on my oath, if you ask it."

"I cannot account for this, captain."

"I charge you, Mr Rubey, not to part with those jewels, or permit them to be disturbed. You know me, sir—I will return in half-an-hour."

Saying this, Captain Harmon immediately repaired to his legal adviser, and a process of replevin was at once issued upon the house of Rubey & Co. for the recovery of the jewels, by their rightful owner. The writ was soon after served upon Rubey & Co., who at once delivered the bracelets into the hands of Captain Harmon, in presence of an officer.

"And now, Mr Rubey, it remains for me to convince you that you have wronged me; you have wronged my friend Darling—unintentionally, I believe—and that you have been imposed upon by one who, *I* am bound to think, is a villain. But time will show."

"What am I to say to the lady who left the order here?"

"When will she send for them?"

"She will not send; she left them here a month ago, and purposed to call at the end of thirty days, when the ornaments were to be ready. We have been unable to execute the commission, and she may be here to-day or to-morrow."

"I will meet her here, sir, by your leave."

"I cannot object, captain."

"I am resolved, sir," continued Captain Harmon, and half an hour afterwards he was at the bedside of his sick friend.

He did not deem it prudent to mention the subject plainly to Harry, yet in order to encourage him, he informed Darling that he had called upon Rubey & Co., and had no doubt, in spite of all that had been said, if he desired to return there when he should recover, there would unquestionably be an opening for him, and matters would be cleared up to the entire satisfaction of Darling, of Rubey & Co., and even of Lord Ermont himself! This last allusion Harry did not understand; but though he considered that his friend, the captain, was rather sanguine than otherwise, yet the information was most welcome to him, and served greatly to accelerate his already improving spirits.

During the next day, Captain Harmon's visits to the jeweller's store were very frequent, and late in the afternoon, a costly equipage,

enriched with baronial bearings, halted at the door of Rubey & Co., from which alighted Miss Ella Erhenart.

"Madam, your humble servant," said Mr Rubey, in his blandest manner, approaching the door as the proud lady entered.

"The bracelets, Mr Rubey."

"I regret to say, madam—we have been unable up to yesterday to find a workman competent to finish your order—and—pray allow me, madam, to present to your notice Captain Harmon, of Beresford, who will explain matters to your satisfaction."

"Explain? Captain Harmon? How is this, Mr Rubey?"

"Captain—" continued Mr Rubey, very greatly embarrassed.

"Your pardon, madam. But may I ask, without offering you offence, where you procured these bracelets?" said Captain Harmon, producing the identical case in which they were originally enclosed, and exposing the jewels.

"Who are *you*, sir?"

"I am Captain Harmon, madam, of Beresford."

"And you presume to interrogate *me*, sir?" continued the haughty woman, drawing herself up.

"These jewels are mine, madam. I have given you my address. Mr Rubey knows me."

"I am the daughter, sir, of Ernest Erhenart, the niece of Lord Ermont. I shall submit to no insult."

"Lady, I apologized at first for any seeming discourtesy which might mark my address to you, and I am not aware that Captain Harmon is capable of offering an insult to a lady. These bracelets, I repeat, are mine—I placed them in charge of Mr Darling two years ago, for sale—in Plymouth, and they were stolen from him."

"Stolen, sir!"

"Stolen, madam! I merely desired to know from whom you had procured them, that I might punish the thief."

The cheek of Ella Erhenart was deadly pale. She turned to Mr Rubey, and merely remarking that she did not anticipate so deep an insult in his presence, and adding that Lord Ermont would instantly wait upon him—she left the establishment, without vouchsafing the slightest reply to the question of Captain Harmon.

As the vehicle rolled away from the door Captain Harmon turned to the proprietor and inquired, very calmly:

"What is your opinion *now*, Mr Rubey?"

"This is a strange world, captain," said the cautious jeweller, and Captain Harmon bade him good evening.

The captain could hardly contain himself, on his return to Darling's room, yet he feared to disturb the nerves of his friend with the exciting intelligence he was in possession of, and which was connected so nearly with Harry's reputation and interest. But he was silent in regard to his discovery.

That night, at twelve o'clock, a post-chaise left London for the south, with Lord Ermont and his aristocratic niece. Miss Ella was "taken ill" in the evening—and becoming alarmed, was so urgent in her entreaties with his lordship, that their departure for home, which

had been fixed upon for the following Monday, was hastened some four or five days. Lord Ermont first arranged with a trusty *confidante* to inform him, daily, of the progress and prospects of young Darling—and in due course of time the nobleman and his niece arrived at Plymouth.

But Darling improved rapidly under the excellent nursing and attention of those whom Captain Harmon had provided to look after him, and the only thought he had (saving his remembrance of Alice) was how he should ever be able to repay his benefactor's kindness.

"Rest perfectly easy on that score, Darling," said his friend; "we shall all be remunerated eventually. I have a surprise for you which you little dream of. Keep up your spirits—get well as fast as possible, and at the proper time, when you can bear it, I have cheering news for you. No, not at present. By-and-by you shall hear it."

CHAPTER XIII.

HARRY'S ASTONISHMENT AT THE DISCOVERY OF THE BRACELETS.

"When friendship once is rooted fast,
It is a plant no storm can sever;
Transfixed, it heedeth not the blast,
But flourishes and blooms for ever!"

ALTHOUGH the name of Lord Ermont had been familiar to him latterly, Captain Harmon was not aware that he had ever yet seen him. He had determined to wait upon his lordship on the following day, and press his inquiries in relation to the agency of his niece in getting possession of the bracelets; but much to his surprise, he learned next morning that Lord Ermont and Miss Ella had left town the night previously—the lady having complained of illness, and desired to be taken home at once. Captain Harmon had his own opinion of the affair, and having called upon the Messrs. Rubey & Co., and asked that a strict secrecy might be observed, for the present, touching the scene which had occurred there, he concluded to learn further particulars from Darling's own lips. He sat at Harry's bedside a day or two after, whose health had very rapidly improved of late, and after some commonplace conversation, alluded to his having left the house of Rubey.

"What course I might have taken," said Harry, "if I had not been hurt immediately upon quitting the store, I cannot say; but I was unfairly dealt by. A gross charge had been thrown out against me, and the gentlemen were not disposed to hear a word of explanation."

"You may have had good reasons, Darling, for doing as you have; but to this day, you have never yet given *me* the details of the loss of those bracelets, you will remember. In general terms, I know you explained the affair at the time to my satisfaction; but you studied to avoid mentioning *names*, at the time of the accident—thinking it possible, I recollect, that you might be mistaken. May I now ask your confidence in this matter?"

"Captain, you can command it, most surely."

"No—I would not do that. But the story is an old one, the bracelets are gone, you have done all you could, I have no doubt, to recover them, and all the chances would surely seem to indicate that they would never turn up again. There can be no harm, now, I fancy, in your confiding to me your suspicions at least."

"None, captain—and I have no wish to conceal anything from so good a friend as you have been to me. But at the time the jewels were lost, I had every reason to believe that a person high in rank and position had been guilty of the purloining—not for the value of the bracelets, but with the expectation of effecting my ruin—for having once crossed her when I had no other alternative."

"And the name of this person was—"

"Miss Ella Erhenart."

"Lord Ermont's niece?"

"The same."

"But you have no evidence?"

"None but my word—and the circumstances of the case as I explained them to you at the time."

"You would know the bracelets, if you should ever meet with them again, I presume?"

"Most certainly should I."

"Do these resemble them?" continued Captain Harmon, calmly drawing forth the casket from his pocket.

Darling could scarcely believe his own senses, and actually placed his hand to his head and rose upright in bed, to determine if he were really awake.

"Captain! Where did you obtain them?"

"You feel certain you know them?"

"I cannot be mistaken."

"Nor I."

Captain Harmon urged Harry not to get excited, and in a quiet tone, informed him of the whole affair—how he chanced to see them at Rubey & Co.'s—how Miss Erhenart left them there to be refashioned, with a view, evidently, of destroying all trace of her guilty act—how he remained in the store until she called personally for them—and how he confronted her.

"But she has left town," continued the captain, "and I have determined to follow her at once. We must have full and ample satisfaction, Darling, for this foul act of imposition, which, but for the merest chance, would never have been known, and for which you, at least, have suffered most unjustly."

"You do not propose to go immediately?"

"This very night, Darling. I shall leave you in the hands of those who will see to your wants faithfully, and in a few days I shall be with you again. The recovery of the jewels will give you the means of paying every debt you owe in the world, for you left but a few hundred pounds unliquidated at the time of your bankruptcy. I will make a good bargain for you, be sure of it. If people will dance, you know they must pay the fiddler—eh, Darling?"

"But what do you propose to do?"

"I shall be governed entirely by circumstances. Leave all to me. Keep yourself quiet—and look for my return within twenty days, sure."

"You will go direct to Plymouth, captain?"

"At once."

"I have a favour to ask of you."

"I shall be most happy to serve you in any way."

"You have heard of Durand the silversmith?"

"I have—and of his pretty daughter, too."

"I would speak of them, captain."

"Of Alice, perhaps," said the captain, good-naturedly.

"Of Alice, and her father too."

"Well."

"When I attempted to commence trade in Plymouth upon my own account, Mr Durand was kind enough to loan me four hundred pounds, for which his little estate is now mortgaged to Lord Ermont, from whom he borrowed the money. The bond has some eighteen months yet to run; but I would be relieved from pecuniary obligation there, as soon as may be. But a short time since I forwarded to Mr Durand one half the claim by draft—a sum which I had saved from my earnings—and there is now due him two hundred pounds, and the interest upon the lien."

"I will see it paid, and will return you the cancelled bond."

"You may do so safely, I think, now, captain; and my interest in the bracelets—for I had paid you what you deemed upwards of half their value—will secure you amply."

"You have no occasion to mention the facts, Darling—all will be right and satisfactory."

"One word more, captain. I had written three or four times to Miss Alice Durand, during the first year after I arrived here. We were betrothed, captain, ere I left Plymouth; but unfair influences were brought to bear against me, and I received no reply, until a few weeks since my letters were returned to me. I have no hopes there—she is affianced to Lord Ermont (so her parting letter informs me); but I would have her know that the bracelets have been recovered, and that I was *not* guilty of participating in their loss, as she now fancies. Tell her this, captain—and say that my heart can never change towards her."

"Come, Darling, no desponding! I shall bring you cheering news, I trust; and I hope to find you entirely recovered, on my return."

Darling pressed the extended hand of his friend, who took leave of him a short time afterward and proceeded forthwith to Plymouth. The finding of the bracelets was the occasion of invigorating Harry's

spirits very materially; and the more he reflected upon their singular discovery, the more anxiety he felt to see his friend again—whom he would certainly have accompanied in his journey, had he been able to leave his room.

Lord Ermont and Miss Ella arrived at home three or four days previously to Captain Harmon's reaching Plymouth; but no word of her chagrin and embarrassment had been hinted by the proud girl to any living being. She had had leisure for reflection, and summoning all her fortitude and nonchalance to aid her, she determined to put a bold face upon the matter and trust to future circumstances for the course she might pursue. She believed her station, wealth, and family would measurably protect her, in case of any disclosures, and she sat down to wait the course of events.

Captain Harmon reached his destination, and having occupied the day in transacting such private business as called for his immediate attention, he called a cab and directed the driver to proceed to "Chateau Blanc, Duke Street." In a few minutes he was set down at the door of Erhenart's elegant mansion. Having ordered the vehicle to be in waiting, he rung and handed his card to the valet for Mr Erhenart, whom he asked to see alone. Captain Harmon was shown into the study of the haughty aristocrat, who received him coldly, and with his customary bombast.

"Captain Harmon, I believe?"

"Mr Erhenart—your servant, sir," said the captain.

"Your business, captain?"

"It is a painful mission, sir."

"Proceed, captain."

"You are acquainted with one Harry Darling?"

"Don't know him, sir."

"The young jeweller, I mean, whom—"

"O yes! He failed here, a year or two ago."

"Yes, sir."

"Ran off with some jewels, I believe?"

"*No*, sir!" said the captain, firmly.

"Well, it matters not; I heard so."

"The rumour was a lie, sir."

"Well, sir, he is dead; what of him?"

"He is not dead, Mr Erhenart."

"No? Such was the report."

"He lives, sir—to confront his enemies, and to punish those who have foully wronged him."

"What's all this to me, captain?"

"Much, to you and yours, sir! The jewels you have alluded to, Mr Erhenart, were stolen from the counter of Mr Darling's store. They were mine, sir. I left them in Darling's charge, for sale; they were stolen, he was ruined, the thief escaped. I perceive by your looks, sir, you have heard this story before."

"How should—you—know, sir—anything?" said the millionaire, agitated and deeply fearful that some evil intelligence was approaching.

"Darling has told me all, sir."

"He is a liar, captain—a low-born wretch—a bankrupt liar, sir!"

"Darling is not a liar, Mr Erhenart! he is not a bankrupt. He can honestly pay principal and interest upon every shilling he owes in the world."

"Well—"

"The jewels have been recovered, sir."

"Well, sir!"

"And were last in possession of your daughter!"

"My daugh—"

"Of Miss Ella Erhenart."

"—sh, captain!" continued the enraged man. "I don't know—anything—about this. I have been—what can be done, captain?"

"Nothing, sir, at present. Here are the jewels—will you choose to summon your daughter?"

"No, captain, no. I pray you spare a father's feelings. I can say nothing to-night—but to-morrow, as early as you will, call on me. You shall go away content."

Captain Harmon arose and took leave of the distressed and humbled commoner, and promised to call upon him again within twenty-four hours. Lord Ermont was instantly sent for, and after a long consultation between the brothers, the daughter of Erhenart was summoned to her father's study. The whole matter was rehearsed to her, and she then informed her father and her uncle under what circumstances Harmon had become possessed of the bracelets. There was no such thing as denying or disproving the facts that the lady had left the jewels at Rubey's in person—she had called for them herself—and in her presence, as well as that of the senior, Mr Rubey, the rightful owner had claimed them. He had afterwards sworn to his property, and had become possessed of it legally, and there could be no doubt he was fully prepared to sustain himself. Darling was still a living witness in the premises—and the father's distress was most intense. He requested his daughter to retire—who was glad thus to escape further embarrassment.

It was many years since Harmon and Lord Ermont had met, and the latter had entirely forgotten the captain's name. Under advice of Ermont, the wealthy commoner decided to *purchase* the jewels, at any cost, on the following day, and thus do away with all cavil, or risk of exposure, which last consideration the proud aristocrat stood much in need of. The brothers separated, and Erhenart looked anxiously for Captain Harmon on the following day: but not till evening came was he announced—when he was instantly conducted to the private apartment of the man of wealth, who received him in a very polite and cordial manner.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE INTERVIEW BETWEEN HARMON AND ERHENART.

"This world is but a weary world,
And friends, at best, are few!"

BETWEEN the father of Miss Ella Erhenart and the owner of the bracelets the last interview was brief.

"I am happy to see you, captain, and have no explanations, concessions, or apologies to offer. The bracelets you brought here last evening are beautiful. Name a price for them, if you please, and I will fill an order upon my banker for the amount."

"No, sir. I do not feel myself authorized to dispose of the jewels, under present circumstances."

"What do you propose, captain?"

"I have no proposal to submit, Mr Erhenart."

"My check is at your disposal for five thousand pounds, on delivery of the jewels."

"It is triple their value, sir; but I hold the jewels subject to Mr Darling's order."

"I will double the sum, captain, to purchase them—and have no further chaffering or implication."

"Mr Erhenart, your whole fortune cannot buy the jewels until Mr Darling consents. Your daughter is in my power, sir—in the power of Henry Darling, the humble jeweller, whom she would have crushed; whom you, sir, have scouted and traduced in my presence; whom your brother, Lord Ermont, has abused, injured, and harassed—but who is now beyond the reach of you all, for evil—and whose fast friend I am proud to proclaim myself!"

"Certainly, captain, you cannot desire to disgrace *me?*"

"I regret the circumstances which have brought about the crisis, sir; but Mr Darling will soon return to Plymouth, and will himself conclude the business which thus far I have broached in his behalf."

"Darling! No, captain, I can't see *him*—I couldn't see him, sir. He has been here, before—and I pray you, Captain Harmon, do not force me to this!"

"I have no alternative; such are his orders. Good-night, sir." Saying which, Captain Harmon peremptorily arose and left the mansion.

The friend of Darling had effected just what he wished to. He had placed the Erhenarts in a position for reflection, and he determined that they should have leisure to think the subject over thoroughly, before Darling could communicate with them. He entertained no doubt that all would eventually turn out just as he desired it, and on the

following morning, agreeably to Darling's request, he called at the dwelling of Durand, where no word of intelligence had been received from Harry for nearly fifteen months. Captain Harmon had heard of the family, but had no personal acquaintance with Durand or his daughter. He knew of his friend's intimacy there, and his love for Alice; but before acquainting them with what he now knew of Darling, he determined he would satisfy himself of their present disposition towards the unfortunate jeweller, and that he would not let them know his own feelings towards him.

Having become seated in the little parlour with Alice and her father, he informed them that he called to make some inquiry in regard to Mr Henry Darling, with whom he had learned they were formerly acquainted. At the name of Darling a flush passed over the cheek of Alice, but she immediately recovered.

"I have understood," said the captain, "that he left this place under peculiarly unfortunate circumstances. I saw him eighteen months since, and formed a very favourable opinion of him; but I have been absent in the north of England for the greater part of the time, during the past year and a half, and on my return to Plymouth, I felt anxious to know how he was getting along. Lord Ermont informs me, indirectly—for I have not seen him personally—that the name of Darling was disruptably connected with the loss of some valuable jewels just before he left, and—"

"Lord Ermont is a slanderer," said Alice, boldly. "Henry Darling was unfortunate, but no shade of dishonour attaches to his name where he is known."

"You are acquainted with the affair, then, Miss?" said the captain.

"Mr Darling has been villified and traduced, maliciously, by those who should have befriended him, sir; but he is probably now beyond the reach of envy's shafts," continued Alice. And as she turned her head towards the window, Captain Harmon thought he saw a tear fall from her bright eye.

"I trust he may ever be thus fortunate, lady."

"He left us more than a year since, sir. We have never heard if he were dead or alive from the night we parted with him."

"Never heard from him?"

"Not a syllable, sir."

"That's very strange. He told me a fortnight ago—'

"*He* told you? Who?" shouted Alice, entirely forgetting herself —as had also the captain in his abrupt remark.

"Beg pardon, lady, but I mean Mr Darling."

"He is alive? You have seen him—safe—well—lately?" urged Alice, in her excitement.

"Alive and well, comparatively, when I left him in London, fifteen days ago."

"In London?"

"In London, Miss."

"He knew you were coming here?"

"Yes, I came here upon his business."

"And he did not write to us?"

"No, Miss. He said—and I was about to tell you at first, but you interrupted me—"

"What did he say, captain?"

"He told me to call upon your father—Mr Durand, I believe, is your father—and pay him two hundred pounds, the balance, with the interest due him, of four hundred pounds Mr Durand had loaned him."

"The balance?" inquired Durand.

"Yes, sir; and the interest. He said he had written Miss Alice three or four letters, during the year before, and received no reply at all until within a very few days, when he got a cold answer from her, returning all his epistles, and informing him that she had renewed the pledge of her hand to Lord Ermont, and in consequence of his having been undoubtedly guilty of dishonour in connection with the affair of the bracelets, she could hold no further communication with him."

"Monstrous!" shouted Alice.

"He bade me to say to Miss Alice that his heart was unchanged towards her; he was innocent of the base charges against him, and time would prove it."

"I never thought him guilty," continued Alice, overcome with grief.

"Your letter said so, lady."

"I never wrote a letter to Darling! From the moment he left this house, I have never known whither he had fled."

"What?" asked Captain Harmon, amazed.

"She speaks truly, sir," added Durand. "There is some unaccountable mystery in all this—forgery has been committed; and it is plain that Darling's letters to my daughter have been taken from the post by other hands, who have since used them for their own purposes."

"Is Lord Ermont bad enough for this?" inquired the captain, coolly.

"I should think not, captain."

"But tell me, Captain Harmon," continued Alice, "is Darling well, and—happy, sir?"

"He has done very well, but his embarrassment here has retarded him somewhat. He has been infamously imposed upon, in regard to yourself—and I am now reminded again, Mr Durand, of the draft for two hundred pounds which he sent you a short time since, some six or eight weeks ago."

"I have never heard of it."

"This is very strange. But cheer up, Miss. I shall return to Darling immediately, and will gladly be the bearer of anything you may have to forward. You will write to him, at any rate."

"Most certainly."

"And you, sir, also?"

"I shall leave town to-morrow. I shall look for the draft I have spoken of, and meantime I desire that you will take this, in behalf of Mr Darling, whose agent I am in the matter, and cancel the bond to Lord Ermont. I promised to return him the document, sir." And saying this, the captain handed Durand a five hundred pound Bank of England note.

Alice desired to say a thousand things to the gentleman, not one of which she could remember amid her conflicting thoughts during his stay, and ere she knew it, scarcely, he had arisen to go.

"There is one little matter," said he, "which I had quite forgotten to mention, and which I presume will interest you here. The stolen bracelets have been recovered."

"Recovered?" said Alice, deeply agitated.

"Recovered?" eagerly asked the old man.

"O, yes! I placed them in Darling's care, originally, and found them one day accidently. But Mr Darling will soon be in town himself, and will explain particulars." With this, Captain Harmon bowed hastily, and left the house of Durand, promising to call on the following evening before he left for London.

Alice Durand, overjoyed, laughed and cried by turns. She could scarcely imagine that Lord Ermont could be so cruel as thus to suffer his selfishness to torture and abuse her; but she felt satisfied, and so did her father, that none but he, or his agents, could have managed to have been so successful in this villany. But no hint was given of their suspicions for the present. The silversmith called upon Lord Ermont next morning, seasonably, with a witness, and, very unexpectedly to his lordship, placed the money before him, in English sovereigns, and demanded that his bond be cancelled.

After some evident dissatisfaction on his lordship's part, the money was received, the note was yielded up, and the bond was duly annulled in form.

"You have received principal and interest, my lord, in full, I believe?" said Durand.

"You have discharged the entire debt—honourably."

"Now, sir, I think there is no further obligation between us?"

"How, sir?"

"You have done with me and mine, Lord Ermont."

"I do not comprehend this, Mr Durand."

"There is no forfeit of the bond, my lord—we are quit. You understand me?"

"We shall see, hereafter, sir!"

The silversmith departed—leaving Lord Ermont in utter consternation. In one moment all his hopes had been frustrated, and he now saw plainly that nothing save active diplomacy, cunning and intrigue, could arrest the current which had so unexpectedly turned against him. Lord Ermont lost no time in preparing for the contest.

Alice devoted the entire day to preparing a long letter to her still fondly-loved Henry. Over and over again she reiterated her unaltered affection for him, she explained the reasons of her non-communication with him, she informed him of her fears and her sufferings in his absence, she dwelt upon the deception which had been practised so unsuccessfully upon herself and him by the estrangement of his letters, she encouraged him and congratulated him upon his prospects and upon the recovery of the stolen bracelets, and closed her epistle with the most affectionate assurances of her continued and continual consideration for him.

At evening Captain Harmon called upon the Durands, and having

taken charge of the cancelled bond, he also received letters from Alice and her father; and with a thousand warm expressions from Durand and his lovely daughter for Darling, and words of friendship for himself, he started on his return to London.

With the cancelling of Lord Ermont's lien on Durand's estate, the insurance policy expired. Durand knew this, and calculated upon renewing it on the following day. His lordship also knew this fact; he knew that Captain Harmon had departed for the metropolis, and he knew, too, that Darling would return to Plymouth within another month.

He was not the man to be readily baffled in any scheme he ever undertook. He had entertained a profound passion for Alice, and he had determined, at any cost, to possess her! His plans had been laid, and he believed himself certain of success, even yet, against so ignoble a rival as he believed the "low-born" Darling to be.

That very night the homestead of Durand was fired and burned to the ground! Scarcely a vestige of house or furniture was saved, and Alice and her father barely escaped with their lives. The insurance policy had run out, and the poor silversmith was ruined!

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTAIN HARMON REACHES LONDON—HIS INTELLIGENCE, AND ITS EFFECT.

"When once the hand is in the lion's mouth,
'Twere well to draw it thence with caution,
And save the skin."

It was late in the afternoon when Captain Harmon arrived in London, after an absence of three weeks. He scarcely knew his friend Darling, so great had been his improvement. During the week previously to the captain's arrival, he had been able to take open air exercise, and had now well nigh entirely recovered from the injuries he had received. His chamber attendants had left him, and he found himself very comfortable when again he pressed the hand of his friend, after his visit to Plymouth.

The letter from Alice astounded him. He saw the deception which had been so basely practised upon him, and he at once suspected Lord Ermont, who was the only man living whom he felt to be his enemy. He knew him to be his rival, but when the cancelled bond of his lordship was placed in Darling's hands, he felt supremely happy.

Captain Harmon gave him a detailed account of his visit to the house of Durand, and also of his conferences with Erhenart. He placed the offer of the man of wealth at the disposal of Darling, but

insisted that he should at once return to Plymouth, arrange his affairs, confront Erhenart personally, make the best bargain he could for the bracelets, and take such measures as might be warranted by the circumstances, to redeem himself in the estimation of those who had unjustly supposed him dishonourable. Harry thought well of this advice, the captain promised to accompany him, and a week afterwards a day was fixed for their departure south again.

Harry had been absent from Plymouth a year and a-half. He was now quite well again, and never looked better than he did the day he left London with Captain Harmon. The journey invigorated him, and upon setting foot in Plymouth he was an entirely new man. He lost no time in driving at once to the house of Durand—or rather to the spot where he left Durand—but where he found only a heap of ashes! He was at a loss which way to turn, but having driven to a hotel, he set about finding his friends who had met with this sudden misfortune—but of which, until this moment, he knew nothing.

At evening he learned the whereabouts of Durand, and in company with Captain Harmon, called to see him and his daughter. A joyful meeting was it to the lovers—while the father of Alice was equally glad to see Darling again, alive and well. The story of the burning was soon told—no one knew anything of the cause. At midnight of the day Captain Harmon left Plymouth, the dwelling had been set on fire, the buildings were entirely destroyed, the insurance had expired, and the inmates found themselves fortunate that they had escaped with their lives. Captain Harmon said little, but he believed the emissaries of Lord Ermont had been hard at work.

His lordship was duly informed in the evening of the day Darling reached town that the jeweller had returned; and but a few hours had elapsed ere a story was current that the handsome artisan had arrived to claim the hand of Alice Durand. It was, moreover, hinted that he came with abundance of ready means, acquired during his absence through some sudden and unknown turn of fortune, for within three days after his arrival, workmen were busily engaged in removing the ruins upon the old Durand estate, and it was said that a skilful architect had been employed to erect a beautiful modern-styled cottage upon the site of the old homestead—which was the fact, by the way—but which had been done at the instance of Captain Harmon, who had volunteered a loan to effect this.

In the meantime, Darling had settled upon the course he should pursue with Mr Erhenart. He had turned the subject over in his mind thoroughly, and after consulting with his friend the captain, it was thought to be advisable that Harry should address a note to the rich commoner, requesting an immediate interview. Under the circumstances, if he choose to purchase the jewels, and pay roundly for his daughter's indiscretion, Harry was satisfied it were better to avoid exposure, and thus obtain the means which he had been deprived of by that daughter's treachery, to sustain and remunerate himself for his lost time and reputation. The world might carp at it, but if he choose to make the *exposé*, he might find it ill to cope with the family's wealth and influence, and he desired to avoid coming again in conflict

with Lord Ermont. After a long consultation with his friends, he sat down and wrote the following letter:—

"Rose Street, Plymouth, Tuesday, A.M.

"SIR,—After an eighteen months' absence from this place, I return to it in possession of *all* the means necessary to the complete exculpation of my name from the foul slur which has been cast upon it, through the agency of a member of your family. Backed by friends and indubitable evidence which will convict your daughter of the commission of a disgraceful act, I have only to ask if it will be agreeable to you to see me at the Chateau Blanc this evening. Awaiting your reply, I am, etc., HENRY DARLING.

"Ernest Erhenart, Esq."

Within the next hour an answer was received from Mr Erhenart, appointing Eight o'clock P.M. for the interview. Alarmed at the peremptory tone of Darling's brief communication, he conferred with his wife, who was in deep distress at her daughter's remissness, who had committed the theft, not because the means in her own right were not ample to have purchased the bracelets, but because she knew it must have the very effect it did upon him who had refused her advancements, and because she was determined to destroy him, if possible. Believing him dead, because he had not been heard from for so long, she exposed herself, and had been trapped! Erhenart had decided to induce Darling to name a consideration for the jewels, and if her father could purchase them, they were to be forwarded at once to London, to the house of Rubey & Co., for resetting—which would ward off further suspicion in that quarter, and would set the matter finally at rest, he believed.

At the hour agreed upon, Captain Harmon accompanied Darling to the door of the Chateau Blanc. They entered. Harry sent up his card, his friend awaited him in the ante-room, and shortly afterward the modest artisan, attired in his neat suit of black, was ushered into the presence of Mr Erhenart and his wife, in a private drawing-room. He was civilly received, and the father of Ella at once called his visitor's attention to the note he had sent him in the morning Harry had with him the casket containing the bracelets, which he placed on the centre-table near where the mother sat, and with a respectful, but determined demeanour, he stood before the parents of Miss Ella—awaiting their pleasure.

"This is your letter, Mr Darling," said Erhenart, coldly, and pointing to the open document he held in his hand.

"It is, sir."

"I have already promised to your friend, Captain Harmon, to purchase the bracelets about which so much has been said. Do you come prepared to respond to my offer, sir?" he asked.

"I come, Mr Erhenart, to say to the parents of Miss Ella that she has deeply wronged me, without just cause—that she has descended from the—"

"I do not propose, sir, to go into the merits or demerits of this unpleasant affair. Suffice it that we are made sufficiently acquainted

with the details of the business to desire that the affair may at once be brought to an issue and for ever."

"I feel myself in duty bound, sir, to explain to you that I have been foully wronged."

"I have offered Captain Harmon ten thousand pounds for the jewels, Mr Darling. The sum is quintuple their value—is it accepted?"

"You are not disposed to hear me, then?"

"I am not inclined to listen to the particulars of this painful subject. I am satisfied you have been put to inconvenience. I believe you have the power to make trouble, for which there is no necessity. I offer you ample payment for that inconvenience—and once more I ask, are you content?"

"With ten thousand pounds?"

"That is the sum I have offered."

"I accept it, sir."

"And the subject is not again to be mentioned."

"I have nothing further to promise, sir."

Captain Harmon was sent for, the business was explained to him; a check was placed in his hands for the amount agreed upon—both Darling and himself signed their acknowledgment to the contract—the bracelets were delivered—and the friends departed from the dwelling of the now humbled and chagrined Erhenarts, content with the result.

On the following day, in company with the captain, Darling called upon every one of his old creditors, with whom he had already honourably compounded for sixteen shillings in the pound, and paid them up in full to the last penny, with interest upon their claims. He then insisted upon remunerating the captain, who at last yielded to his request, so far as the balance due him upon the jewels were concerned, and after all, found himself the rightful owner of nearly eight thousand pounds sterling.

While this was transpiring, the workmen employed upon the Durand estate were actively engaged in pressing forward preparations for the new cottage. Durand had provided himself with comfortable quarters, temporarily, and the lovers were again happy with their prospects.

But Lord Ermont had not been idle! Through his spies, he had narrowly watched every act of Darling and his friends, and he had now concocted an infernal scheme, with the consummation of which he believed his young and now successful rival would be for ever placed beyond further competition with him, and a new and final prospect would be opened to him to obtain the hand of Alice Durand. His plans were laid—we shall soon learn how they succeeded.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VILLANOUS PLOT OF LORD ERMONT'S SPIES.

"The course of true love
Never did run smooth?"
* * * *
"The danger thickens—master."

Lord Ermont had employed a brace of trusty scoundrels, who were well paid, with a view to the destruction of Darling, who dogged his footsteps night and day; but the unconscious lover had laid his future plans with a view to establish himself again in his business at Plymouth, and the day of his union with the innocent and lovely Alice had already been fixed upon, only a few weeks ahead; he had no thought of evil—he believed that slander had done its worst with him—and, satisfied with his triumph, the society of his loved Alice, and the smiles of the many friends he had made by his conduct since his return—he lived on, nor dreamed of the terrible trial he was so soon to be called upon to encounter!

It was evening—a fortnight after his arrival. He had passed a few hours at the dwelling of his father-in-law, and at a later hour than was his wont, after a happy interview with Alice, he left for his lodgings. His custom, on returning from Durand's to his hotel, was to pass through a short, narrow street, leading into one of the main avenues, to save distance, and he turned into this passage as usual on this occasion. As he moved along, he suddenly came in contact with the postrate form of a man, which was extended across the walk. He halted, and stooping down over the body, he discovered that his face was bathed in blood, and a deep gash appeared on his forehead. He appeared to be senseless, and his hands were very cold. As Darling was about to rise again, he found himself seized upon by two stout men, who secured his arms, and set up a cry for help!

The night-watch was instantly upon the spot—the man was found to be dead; the two strangers declared they saw Darling in a scuffle with the unfortunate person, who had been thrown by him violently to the ground, and in his fall his skull had been fractured! At the moment of his seizure, Harry felt the hand of one of his assailants thrust into the outside pocket of his coat, and supposed the villains intended to rob him; but he was borne forthwith to the lock-up, his hands were placed in irons, and upon searching his dress, in his pocket was found a large wallet containing sundry papers and a few sovereigns, which were supposed to belong to the dead stranger, and which was thought by the officers to have been the object of Darling's attack upon him.

The wallet and papers were proved the next day to be the property of a drover who tarried at the same house where Darling boarded, and the

body was subsequently identified by his friends. It was believed that Darling had observed him at the hotel, with large sums of money, that he had tracked him out, and decoyed him in some way into the dark passage where he was found, and in the struggle to rob him he had thrown him down and caused his death, as had been shown. They were known to be on terms of acquaintance—Darling's previous character, the rumours touching the bracelets, his sudden disappearance from the town some months before, his failure, and his return with ample means (obtained nobody knew where)—all conspired to make out a case of ready suspicion. The scoundrels who had seized him were detained by the police as witnesses against him, and upon his examination the day after, before a magistrate, he was fully committed to the higher court, for the alleged murder of the drover!

A confidential report of the result of their scheme was put in possession of Lord Ermont on the very night of the occurrence. The unfortunate drover was addicted to intemperance, and having been out with a friend during the evening, had imbibed too freely, and, thoroughly intoxicated, he was on his way to the hotel, when he fell heavily on the ground, and fractured his skull upon the edge of the curbstone. The spies of Lord Ermont, on the look-out for Darling that night, saw the drover fall, and knowing that it was the custom of Harry to pass through this narrow street, they had possessed themselves of the wallet, had drawn the body into the passage, placed it across the sidewalk near where he fell, and awaited the arrival of their unconscious victim. As he stooped over the body, they clutched him, hastily thrust the dead man's wallet into his pocket, to further their cursed plan, shouted for aid, and thus implicated Darling in an apparent murder!

Lord Ermont lost no time in furthering the plan for his young rival's annihilation—which had thus far been so singularly successful. His influence "at court" was powerful, his thorough knowledge of the laws was acknowledged, and he set himself, at once, about effecting his appointment as counsel for the Crown, in the approaching trial of Darling, whom he now intended should not escape him. His object was readily effected, and long before the time appointed for the trial, it was very generally known through the press that "the government had been fortunate enough to secure the services of the distinguished and eminent Lord Ermont as deputy prosecutor."

It was contended by the officers who had the prisoner in charge (through advice and command of his lordship!) that the case was a deeply aggravated one, and the government had determined that it would be incompatible with the measures of justice, after Darling's committal, to permit him to hold any communication whatever with his friends. Counsel would be provided for him in time, but the admittance of Captain Harmon, or of Durand, to see him, was unconditionally refused under orders. The innocent prisoner was compelled to be incarcerated for some weeks prior to his final trial, without the consolation of seeing or hearing from a being he loved—and his misery can be but faintly imagined!

In the meantime, the distress of Alice was almost maddening. The

newspapers teemed with inflammatory and scandalous paragraphs alluding to the unfortunate Darling and his previous career, articles were constantly being furnished through the agents of Lord Ermont, redishing the distressing details of the testimony which had been hatched up against the prisoner; every description of trick was resorted to on the part of his deadly enemies, Lord Ermont and the Erhenarts, to traduce him and prejudice his case; and when his trial was finally announced to come of, there were not five men in Devonshire county who had not become thoroughly satisfied of his guilt!

Through the active exertions and the ready means of Captain Harmon, counsel of Darling's own choice had finally been appointed to defend him, and up to this time the captain had not seen Lord Ermont. Learning that he had been appointed to represent the Crown, in the coming trial of his friend, whom he could not believe guilty of the shocking crime charged against him, he determined to visit his lordship, and endeavour through his influence (as he believed he might), to obtain admission to Darling. For this purpose he waited upon him one evening a week before the day set for trial.

The captain was shown into an elegantly-furnished apartment, at the residence of Lord Ermont, where he found a fine-looking, gentlemanly man, some years short of forty to appearance, though he was considerably older, who rose on his entrance, and in a polite but reserved manner invited him to a chair. He looked upon his face intently —and after an instant felt certain that he had seen him before; but where, or under what circumstances, he could not call to mind. Lord Ermont scanned his visitor in return, but evinced no previous knowledge of him.

"I called, sir," said Captain Harmon, "to speak with your lordship of my unfortunate friend, Mr Darling, now confined in prison upon a charge of which I believe he is as innocent as is your lordship or myself."

"Well, sir," said Ermont, calmly.

Again the sound of Lord Ermont's voice struck familiarly upon the captain's ear, and again he looked at him intently.

"You seem to be quite as deeply interested in *my* appearance, as in the cause of your friend, sir," continued the nobleman, observing the scrutinizing gaze of the captain.

"Have we not met before, my lord?" inquired Captain Harmon, still doubtingly.

"Not that I am aware of, sir."

"I am Captain Harmon, my lord. I remember—vividly—certainly—"

"You remember *what*, sir?"

"Look on me, my lord. More than twenty years have passed, but I cannot have mistaken that brow, those eyes, that expression."

"You astonish me, sir, with these enigmas," replied his lordship, evidently disturbed by the remarks of his guest.

"Lord Ermont—twenty-two years ago, I was master of the Meteor, bound from the Mediterranean to Liverpool. Were you not wrecked in the Hesper?"

"I was—"

"Who saved your life, my lord?"

"The men from your barque, captain, and I now remember you distinctly. Time has not dealt gently with you, captain, since then—I should not have known you."

"My friend, then, my lord, is in trouble. Henry Darling, who is innocent, I believe, of all crime, is confined in a loathsome prison, and I have learned that you have been appointed to appear against him for the Crown. I would see him before his trial—"

"Captain, command me in any way where I have the power to serve you, and I shall be most happy to respond. But our instructions are explicit, and the prisoner cannot be seen. I am your debtor—I would serve you gladly, but I cannot go behind orders."

"My lord, Henry Darling is innocent."

"I trust it may be made so to appear, captain."

"His friends are in distress at his confinement."

"He has brought the trouble on his own head."

"I repeat it, he is guiltless, my lord."

"You *know* it?"

"I believe it."

"That is not evidence, captain."

"And there is no way to communicate with him?"

"None at present."

"He cannot be convinced of murder, my lord."

"Perhaps not."

"He must not be!"

"That remains to be seen."

Finding importunity unavailing, Captain Harmon cut short the interview, and left his lordship to his reflections. Lord Ermont knew that Darling was innocent; Captain Harmon did not. The captain was Darling's friend, his lordship was the jeweller's deadly enemy. The rough-hearted sailor thought Lord Ermont an ungrateful scoundrel, who had far better been drowned rather than saved; and Lord Ermont very unexpectedly feared that he had now another formidable personage to encounter in his rival's friend!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE APPROACHING CRISIS.

—"Hard was his doom!
So young—yet such a criminal;
He seemed not like a wretch,
But yet the 'law' did so decide!"

DARLING had already received notice from his counsel that his trial would take place on a certain day, and the details of the charge and the evidence, which had been brought up for him to defend against, had all been rehearsed to him. He felt conscience-clear, and he told but one story in reference to the scene which occurred on the night of his arrest. His counsel saw plainly that no defence could be made out, which could for one moment stand before a jury, but though the case was hopeless, he determined to meet it on the general issue, and trust to fortune for circumstances.

"I believe," said Darling, to his legal adviser, as he was about to leave for the last time, prior to the morning of his trial, "I feel assured that Lord Ermont knows me to be innocent. From a variety of causes, I am forced to this conviction, and if my impressions of that man are correct, I believe him fully equal to the task of having planned and carried out the scheme to place me in this present trying condition. He will crush me, at last—and if the witnesses are believed by the jury, I grant you the case is a desperate one. My life, in a great measure, is in the hands of a powerful and determined rival and enemy, and I have little hope for the result. Heaven knows, at least, that I am innocent of this terrible accusation!"

"Circumstances are most decidedly against you, Mr Darling. I must tell you so—and I will add that your explanation will avail nothing, of course, in a court of law. You have no witnesses, you say?"

"No living being was present that I know of, save the two men who seized upon me. The wallet was put into my coat pocket, at the moment they fell upon me. I had but just reached the body as they came up. I can only say, I knew nothing of the condition of the deceased an instant before, and cannot but reiterate my convictions that, in some way, it was purposely contrived to ruin me."

"It is a very strange occurrence."

"Villany, sir, is generally dark and inexplicable."

"You are ready, then, for trial, Mr Darling?"

"Whenever it suits the pleasure of the court to summon me. I would have you see Mr Durand's family to-night, and beg them, for God's sake, not to be present at the trying scene I am about to pass through. Tell them that Henry Darling has pledged you his word,

before God, that he is innocent—but asks, nay, entreats, that they may not be present at the trial. I would also have you write to my father, Benjamin Darling—or send for him. But until the result of the trial is known, I cannot see the Durands. Captain Harmon you will find at the Lion Inn, Front Street. Him I should be glad if you will consult with. I have nothing to add, sir—but shall await my summons firmly, and must abide the dreadful issue!"

His counsel offered him such encouragement as he found himself able to impart, and finally left him alone. On the following morning his trial was to take place. From the moment the intelligence of Darling's arrest was made known to Durand and his daughter, their distress had been indescribable. Alice would not be comforted. Repeatedly had she applied to the jailor to be admitted to the cell of her lover, but the keeper's orders were imperative to admit no one but his counsel, and she had as often been disappointed. The legal gentleman chosen by Darling to defend his cause had often called upon the family of Durand, and it was consolation to Alice and her parent to hear from him, and to listen to the repeated protestations he had made to his counsel of his entire innocence.

On the evening before his trial, an hour after his attorney had left him, the bolts of his prison room were drawn back, and Lord Ermont was shown into his cell by the jailor.

"I hope to find you well, Mr Darling," said the hollow-hearted nobleman, as he sat down, and the door was closed upon them.

"I am content to bide my time, my lord, and regret the necessity which should have induced your lordship to intrude upon me."

"I have called upon you, young man, because I feel a pity for you."

"Your lordship is very kind!"

"I do not come here, sir, to bandy words. We are now alone; your life is in my hands. A strange fatuity of circumstances has unluckily brought us in conflict for some years back, and you have crossed my path already too often. There are but two witnesses to your guilt—they may or may not be present to testify against you; that rests with me."

"From the outset, sir, I have believed you knew me innocent! Why is it that you thus pursue me, my lord—?"

"I have no explanations to offer, sir. Swear me a solemn oath that you will leave this place, and for ever, on your acquittal; swear to me that you will never again pretend to the hand of Alice Durand, and that you will relinquish all claim upon her—and you shall be free before the setting of another sun!"

"Never! Monster—" said Harry, proudly.

"I have been traduced, slandered, abused, belied. I am now, perhaps, on the very threshold of my grave; it may be that ere another sun shall set, the fiat will have gone forth which may consign me to an awful death; but the consciousness of innocence, my lord, buoys me up, in the present, as it has before in the dark hours of affliction."

"You now hold your fate in your own hands, young man."

"It may be so, but sooner than be a party to so vile a proposal as you have hinted at, I shall risk the ordeal."

"You have determined?"

"I have, my lord."—"Your fate is sealed, sir!"

"Be it so—death, rather than voluntary dishonour!" said Harry, and the disappointed nobleman gave the signal to the turnkey.

Morning came. At eleven o'clock the summons arrived, and Darling was taken to the court-room. An immense crowd pressed into every vacant spot in and about the building, and among the first who greeted him, as he was placed in the prisoner's dock, was his friend Captain Harmon. He sat by his counsel, and the moment Darling was released from his irons he felt the warm pressure of his friend's hand in his own. No word was spoken, a tear fell from the eyes of the prisoner, and the examination proceeded.

The indictment was read, the response in a clear voice, "not guilty," from the accused, and the witnesses were called. Lord Ermont watched his victim for a time, but after rehearsing the details which he was prepared to prove, all of which, he contended, fixed the fact that the prisoner had been guilty of unprovoked and wilful murder, he examined the faithful tools he had employed to entrap and condemn his rival. They testified pointedly to all the particulars of the scuffle and fall, and how the prisoner was seized in the act; the night police confirmed the story, and swore to the wallet and contents, belonging to deceased, which had been found in Darling's coat immediately afterwards—and the court inquired if the defence had any witnesses to produce.

The reply by the accused's counsel was in the negative, and his comments were brief: he saw plainly there was no shadow of chance for his client. In his final plea, Lord Ermont was eloquent, forcible, convincing; and the case was at length given to the jury. After an absence of less than fifteen minutes, they returned with a verdict of GUILTY!

The court adjourned for an hour, and as the trial had been arranged at great expense, and had already caused some delay, it was decided by the bench that sentence should be pronounced at evening. At the appointed time, the court and prisoner, and counsel came in, the crowd filled the room, and order was finally restored, when the presiding judge called upon the prisoner, and asked if he had anything to say why sentence should not now be passed upon him. Darling arose, pale and distressed at heart, but firm and calm in his demeanour.

"I have but a single word to utter, my lords," he said. "Of the dreadful crime imputed to me I am innocent as are your lordships. I am the victim of a terrible revenge; and there is now in the presence of this court, within the sound of my feeble voice, one who must hereafter answer to a higher tribunal than this, for being accessory to my awful doom!"

The eye of Darling fell upon Lord Ermont at this instant; an aching stillness pervaded the room, and a deep sense of sympathy was felt for the unfortunate prisoner.

"I have nothing to add, my lords. I feel my innocence. Fate is against me—but I submit—and am ready for sentence."

Darling was doomed to death; the prisoner was remanded, the crowd separated, and Lord Ermont had triumphed!

CHAPTER XVIII.

ALICE'S VISIT TO DARLING IN PRISON.

"But now a storm is gathering there—
Which sure must rend his heart in twain!"

Upon the day of the trial, no effort could persuade Alice to remain at a distance from the court-room; and at the house of a friend residing in the immediate vicinity she remained from early morning up to the closing of the terrible scene. The result was announced to her at a late hour, and swooning at the intelligence, she was borne home in charge of her father and Captain Harmon.

The day of execution had been fixed upon to take place within a month. Darling had become entirely resigned to his fate, and only asked that he might now see his friends, from whom he had been separated so long, by the stringent and unjust regulations imposed on him during his confinement, through Lord Ermont's management. Alice revived and looked almost cheerful, when told that she would soon have the opportunity to meet Darling once more; and on the day following his sentence, she was admitted. with her father and the captain, to a conference with the doomed Darling, in presence of the under sheriff. She fell upon his breast in the dungeon where he was confined, but neither Alice nor Henry had words for utterance. Their hopes were blasted! She felt and believed him innocent—but they could look forward only to the separation soon to arrive, which was to be final!

Alice knew all that it was necessary she should know, and of his eventual fate neither felt now disposed to speak. The hard-featured officer wept, the gallant captain was painfully silent in his grief, and the scene was one well calculated to enlist the deepest sympathy. The hour allotted them for the interview had expired ere they had scarcely believed a tithe of the time had passed, and the lovers were again separated. All was lost, they exchanged a farewell, and it having been understood that Darling should see his friends again, he was finally left alone once more.

A messenger had been despatched by Captain Harmon to bring the good old Ben Darling to Plymouth, but the foster-father of Harry was bowed down with age and infirmity. He did not make his appearance, and the anxious captain at once took a post-chaise and repaired to his dwelling in person. Five days had yet to elapse, and the distance was twenty leagues; but the importunities of Darling to see his father (as he believed him) were such, that Harmon determined to bring him up if the thing were possible.

Arriving at his dwelling, he found him so severely afflicted with a

chronic affection, that it was entirely out of the question to move him, and he could only weep with the kind-hearted captain, and bewail the awful fate of his loved boy.

"He has been to me as dear as if he were my own flesh and blood, captain—but this is a sorrowful tale!"

"Then he is not your son?" said Captain Harmon, astonished.

"No—bless you, captain, no! It is now more than a score of years since I saved the little fellow's life from a piece of wreck which came ashore here, just below, at the point."

"The vessel's name?" said the captain, in breathless anxiety.

"We could never learn. She beat to atoms on the Coral Reef—so we supposed—and nothing ever came to light to indicate what was her name or character. But Harry always thought us his parents—and a good boy he was, till he left us. My wife loved him dearly, but she is dead now some three years, and will not be distressed with these painful tidings."

"And no token ever told you of the boy's parentage?" continued Captain Harmon, as a terrible suspicion flashed upon his imagination.

"No, captain; nothing. Yes, yes—that is—I remember now, that on the night I brought the little fellow home—it was a dreadful night, captain—his wet robes were taken off by my good woman, and upon his arm was clasped a heavy coral ornament, which my wife always took a deal of care of."

"Is it preserved?"

"Yes, in the bureau drawer on your right, captain. Lift the casing—there you'll find it."

Captain Harmon sprang to the old-fashioned secretary, possessed himself of the bracelet, shook the old man's hand, and promised to see him again in a week. His horses were instantly ordered, and six hours afterwards he set foot again in Plymouth. He lost no time in proceeding to the house of Durand, and during his rapid journey up to town his plan was settled on.

He was soon in conference with Durand and his daughter, and though he dared not trust himself to tell them all he believed, he cheered them with the intelligence that a chance for Darling's escape, even yet, had sprung up within a few hours. He informed them that he had obtained some information which led him to hope for succour even at the "eleventh hour."

Half-an-hour after Captain Harmon's arrival the usual quiet of Lord Ermont's dwelling was startled by the violent ringing of the door-bell, and a stranger forced himself suddenly in and demanded an immediate audience with Lord Ermont. His lordship was quietly enjoying the society of a few friends in his splendid drawing-room, when the excited captain followed the valet to his apartment. His aristocratic niece, Miss Elle Erhenart, with her brother, and a suitor for her hand, were conversing with Lord Ermont—and the lady of his brother was also present. The sudden and unceremonious entrance of the captain into the room brought the whole party to their feet, saving Lord Ermont, who never allowed himself to be disturbed with any ordinary occurrence, and who still remained seated.

"You remember me, my lord?"

"Captain Harmon, I believe."

"Captain Harmon, formerly of the Meteor."

"Well, sir?"

"I saved your life!"

"You did, sir."

"But three days now remain to Henry Darling!"

"He is a murderer, captain!"

"He is innocent."

"He has been convicted—"

"Through whose agency, my lord?"

"What means this violence, sir?" asked Lord Ermont, peremptorily, his face turning deadly pale.

"My Lord Ermont, be calm, if you can, while I call to your remembrance a scene you cannot but recognize. More than twenty years ago you were a passenger on board the ship Hesper, bound to Bristol. She was wrecked off Lizard Point, and your wife and child were buried in the waves—"

"Well, captain?"

"Do you know this bracelet?" continued the captain, as he exposed the coral clasp to the astounded gaze of his lordship.

"God of mercy! Whence came this?"

"You know it, then, my lord? It was taken from the arm of an infant boy some two years old, who floated on the beach on the night of the wreck of the Hesper. He was secured to a portion of the tafferel of the ship."

"But he was dead!"

"He was alive, my lord! He was taken care of, and nursed by a poor wrecker; and afterwards, at the age of sixteen, was sent to Plymouth, and placed an apprentice in the house of Farquand the jeweller."

"No, captain—no!"

"He was abused, belied, driven hence, pursued by the malice of Ermont, crushed beneath his lordly carriage wheels in the streets of London, defamed—"

"Stop, captain!"

"He was hunted down, entrapped, imprisoned, tried, convicted, and, three days hence, he must mount the scaffold! My lord, *he is your son!*"

"*He is!*" shouted Ermont, springing from his chair and falling into the arms of his nephew, palsied by the terrible revelation which had just been made.

Captain Harmon, half frenzied with the excitement of the moment, stood with his hand to his brow, supported by the valet, while Ella and her mother were dumb with agitation and surprise. For a moment a dreadful suspense seized upon the terrified group!

CHAPTER XIX.

SUDDEN DANGER OF LORD ERMONT.

"Thrice is he armed—
Who hath his quarrel just;
And he's but naked, though locked up
In steel—whose conscience
With injustice is corrupted!"

After the shock which Captain Harmon's disclosure had caused Lord Ermont, he rallied immediately, and turning to the captain he said:

"Quick! speed, for your life, to my Lord Brandon! Tell him all! Tell him there is a mistake—the boy is innocent! The coral bears the likeness of my father; I know it. The prisoner is my child! For Heaven's sake, speed—he must be saved!"

The friend of Darling did not hesitate to follow the directions of his lordship, whose manner and words were incoherent and fitful, but who evidently saw there could be no mistake about the identity of his child, as the bracelet was a curious one, and contained the initials of his mother's maiden name, "H. D."

The scene of the wreck came up before his now bewildered imagination, and he fancied he could hear again the cries of terror and distress which fell from the lips of his wife, as she parted from him amid the storm, on that dreadful night. Again he saw his lovely boy dashed into the troubled waters, and then came the remorse—bitter, deep, frenzied!

He reflected on the course he had pursued towards his own son—how he had persecuted, vilified, and oppressed him—how he had neglected and wronged him—how he had followed him with a vindictive spirit, from his first meeting with him, up to the very verge of his destruction; and when his thoughts turned again to the loathsome cell where that son now lay in irons, awaiting the hour of his final doom, he started suddenly to his feet, and shrieked in his agony.

"Save him! Save my son!" he cried, to the friends around him. And at this moment Lord Brandon entered the room in company with Captain Harmon and Durand.

Lord Brandon was the presiding judge upon the bench at the time of Harry's conviction, and to him Lord Ermont now turned, desperate in his anguish.

"Save my son, my lord! The youth Darling is innocent—I *know* him to be innocent. I confess it all. I tell you, my lord, the guilty man is here!" And Ermont struck his breast, which heaved violently, while big drops of sweat stood on his pallid forehead. "It was all a cursed plan to destroy him! *I* employed the wretches who waylaid the innocent boy, who seized upon him as he approached the fallen body, and who swore falsely before you that the boy was guilty! *I* intercepted his letters—his draft is in the escritoire! *I* caused

Durand's house to be fired—*I* am guilty of his unjust implication! *I* did it—*he is my son!* The bracelet—the wreck—the boy! Take me—I give him all—save—save!"

"Quick!" said Lord Brandon; "fly for a surgeon."

"He has but fainted," ventured his nephew. "It is but a repetition of the effect of this shocking intelligence, which just now occurred."

"He is dying, sir," said the judge.

Restoratives were actively applied to the mouth and temples of the sufferer, and a skilful physician arrived in a few minutes. He held his pulse; he pressed his hand upon the heart of the nobleman. But his misery in this world was over—the heart had ceased to beat!

"He is *dead*, my Lord Brandon!" said the surgeon, impressively. "His excitement has caused the bursting of a blood-vessel, doubtless."

The relatives of his lordship crowded around his inanimate body, and tears fell from the eyes of the spectators, who but a short time previously were so gay and happy, conversing with him.

As the judge was about to leave the painful scene, he turned to the persons present, in a calm but dignified manner, and called their attention to the dying confession of Lord Ermont.

"I call upon you all," he said, "to remember the painful details of this scene, for I have a duty to perform—and immediately, too, to the living. The son of Lord Ermont—the heir to his title and fortune—now lies in chains, sentenced to death! I shall take immediate measures to represent the case to the Crown, and shall cause the execution of his sentence at once to be deferred until a return can be obtained. A messenger will be immediately despatched to London, to lay a representation of this extraordinary case before the government, and the parties present will hereafter be required to give their evidence in regard to it."

Lord Brandon withdrew in haste; and within an hour a courier was on his way to the metropolis with an official account of the death-scene of Lord Ermont, and of his singular and voluntary confession. An order was given that night to the sheriff to postpone the day of Darling's execution until further notice, and instructions were also sent to the deputy who had charge of Darling's person, to remove him at the earliest moment from his confinement to comfortable quarters, and to allow him every convenience, save his liberty (which the court had no power to grant), which might be compatible with a view to his supposed innocence of the charge alleged against him, and his prospective release by the Crown.

Most unexpectedly were the prison doors of Darling thrown open that night! His friends Captain Harmon and Durand were there, and they embraced him as if he were their own! His chains were removed, the state of things was briefly explained to him, he was taken to the jailor's house, where a handsome parlour was appropriated to his use, and where he was informed that, for a few days, he would be at liberty (under order of the court) to receive his friends—but that an officer must necessarily attend upon him, until the courier returned from London.

The change of quarters was not displeasing to Harry, but he could scarcely realise that Lord Ermont was his father! The coral bracelet

he had seen a hundred times, and had as often heard the story connected with it; but still he had believed Darling and his good wife to be his parents. He had never known others, and content with his position, he lived on, nor desired to look for better! It was midnight when Harry parted with the father of Alice and the worthy Captain Harmon, and grateful indeed was the intelligence they bore to the anxious girl who waited their return.

Harry insisted that they should call upon him with Alice early on the next day, which they did; but we shall not attempt a description of the meeting of the lovers—suffice that it was a joyful one. His friends were constantly with him, the formal application for his release had been forwarded to head quarters on the day after Lord Ermont's death, signed by the whole bench of judges, and the evidence of all the parties present at the scene also accompanied the opinion of the court in regard to Darling's unqualified innocence of the charge made against him.

In the meantime the wretches who, under the favour and pay of Ermont, had conspired to destroy the nobleman's son, had been arrested; they were subsequently tried for conspiracy, and confessed their guilt and were transported for life. In fifteen days, the courier returned to Plymouth with an unconditional release for Henry Darling. The news spread through the town like wildfire, and the innocent jeweller—now, by hereditary right, Lord Ermont—was escorted from the jailor's house to the dwelling of Durand by an immense crowd of sympathizing friends.

Alice was happy—so was her father, her lover, and the noble-hearted Captain Harmon, and a thousand plans for the future were laid, as the friends met once more, after the exciting scenes of the previous day, in the quiet quarters of the humble but worthy silversmith. But Darling had now important business upon his hands, which he found it necessary to attend to—personally and promptly!

CHAPTER XX.

HARRY IN POSSESSION OF HIS FATHER'S ESTATES.

"Truth is mighty, and must prevail."

The best legal counsel in Devonshire county was at once retained to establish the claim of Harry to the immense estate of his father; and the good Ben Darling had so far regained his health as at length to be able to come up to Plymouth as a witness in regard to the boy's parentage. The dress worn by the infant at the time he was rescued had been carefully preserved, and was produced and sworn to by old Ben. The letter covering the draft for two hundred pounds, addressed to Alice Durand, was found in his lordship's desk, and proven; the coral clasp was also identified again by him; and the

family coat-of-arms of Lord Ermont was found elaborately wrought upon the bosom of the frock found on the child at the time he was saved by the wrecker. But the acknowledgments of Lord Ermont, just before his death, were admitted as a crowning corroboration of the boy's legitimacy, and the whole fortune of his lordship was readily placed in possession of his heir by the legal authorities.

While the investigation was pending, the workmen upon the cottage had erected a beautiful and tasty dwelling; the land was newly decorated, and the house, when completed, was elegantly furnished. Harry insisted that Durand should take possession of it as his own, and forthwith settled upon the good old man a competency for life. Harry thought the name of Lord Ermont had been disgraced, and he stoutly refused to adopt the title, preferring to retain his own humble cognomen, which, though it had suffered reproach, he felt had never been really tainted with dishonour.

The Erhenarts removed to a remote portion of the county, despised by those who knew them, and Miss Ella lived for some years after, neglected and but little cared for, though her guilt towards Darling was never exposed. The foster-father of Harry was made comfortable, but his disease preyed upon him, and he fell a victim to it, at an advanced age. The kind-hearted Captain Harmon established his residence in the town, and lived long in the enjoyment of his hard-earned wealth, happy to see his friends Darling and Alice happy.

Three months after Lord Ermont's death, Darling bore to the altar his long-loved and beautiful Alice. A magnificent estate in the outskirts of the town, belonging to the lands of his father, served him for a residence, and he found his rent roll ample to his most sanguine wants and wishes. With his lovely bride, he lived to enjoy his riches, and was ever after proverbially known for his hospitality and nobleness of character. His wife was modest, gentle, benevolent—and was deeply beloved for her virtues by all who knew her.

The establishment of Farquand still flourished, and though the modest Mrs Darling had little desire for undue display, her splendid carriage was occasionally seen at the fashionable jeweller's door, and the lofty merchant was wont to be exceedingly attentive to the lady whom he had known in humbler life, in the scenes of other days!

Henry Darling did not prove over-ambitious, and he steadily refused the repeated offers of his friends to run him for the House of Commons, from the county in which he had so long resided. He scorned all empty titles, and was content to live on quietly, in the enjoyment of the many social blessings with which he found himself surrounded.

Alice was lovingly faithful, she saw her husband contented and happy, herself and her fond parent in the enjoyment of every luxury—and their days and months and years slipped by in ease and joy. They were above need, their friends were warm-hearted, and though they could not avoid, occasionally, recurring to scenes long past, in which they had been so differently situated, yet they did so naturally to contrast the present with the other, and never forgot the kind Providence which had borne them safely through all—and which left them in the full realization of more than their brightest hopes in the end.

THE SICILIAN ARGOSY.

A STORY OF THE SEA.

STARTLING rumours crept through Sicily. A single slave-ship ploughed the Mediterranean, to and fro with its transits of living cargoes from the African coast; and common report in the Tyrrhenian Sea made this vessel in the secret service of the Russian emperor, who, unable to fill his Siberian mines with Polish exiles fast enough, employed a hireling minion to enslave the Ethiopian.

Dark hints and deep misgivings prevailed with regard to the character of the man who thus, for princely rewards, carried on through the merry Mediterranean this isolated slave-trade. Xebeques from Sicily, feluccas from Genoa, bombardes from Naples, polacres from Venice, had successively time and again been put upon the track of the slaver Sampsona; but the swift-winged Spanish lugger of the famous slave-dealer defied the combined pursuit of all the picturesque rigs of the Mediterranean. The horror of the slave-traffic which prevails in those districts it seemed impossible to gratify by the visitation of condign punishment upon the slaver chief; whom indeed, to the superstitious Sicilians, the fiends themselves appeared to befriend; for beside his miraculous escapes upon the high seas, he had frequently been known, when fearlessly appearing upon land in the very midst of his most determined enemies, to have successfully defied their most desperate attempts at his capture, previously invisible allies suddenly springing up like magic around his seemingly unprotected person, at the very moment that the worthy Sicilians were congratulating themselves on the trapping of the "cunning fox."

The fact of the horror in which this vessel was held, strongly superadded perhaps to a dark report current in the Sicilian seaport, that her commander had in consequence of a rumoured depredation upon the commerce of the Mediterranean, become little better than a pirate, was a circumstance to which probably was attributable the singular movements of the lugger, as just at the Italian nightfall, instead of entering the regular harbour, she put into a little concealed basin which forms a rock-bound haven on the least frequented coast of Sicily; an island which from the days of the Carthaginian mariners down, has formed a sort of marine halfway house for the voyagers of the magnificent Mediterranean.

Hurriedly addressing his mate, Sampsona, who stood upon his quarter deck superintending with a sailor's watchful vigilance the secret entrance of his hunted ship to the concealed cove, sternly said:

"Bring the lugger to anchor right under yon jutting rock, Michaelo!

Then immediately send the cutter's crew to block up the entrance of the cove with our iron-barricade, to prevent all ingress of vessels from without! Ha, ha! the hunters after the Sicilian slaver little dream that at will he can close the seas behind him!"

"Blockaders! make ready with the submarine barricade!" commanded the lieutenant; and himself leaped into the cutter which was already manned by its crew of "picked men," who soon succeeded, with the ease and rapidity of practised experience, in effectually barricading the cove against the entrance of even a vessel of the lightest draught, by means of a machine entirely unknown in American waters, but in secret use among the buccaneer and lawless sea-rovers, and which in the present instance was a sort of immense iron door, submerged beneath and stretched entirely across the narrow mouth of the secret harbour, which it thus completely blockaded,—thus enabling the slave-ship to hold an isolated position in the cove, entirely securing it from all marine attacks.

By the time the barricading party had regained their ship, the vessel itself had been warped to the desired point, and now lay broadside to a lofty cliff which walled the concealed cove, its rocky summit on a level with the topmost spars of the slavers.

And with these portentous words Sampsona sprang quickly into the rigging, and with a reckless haste that seemed to threaten inevitable death as the certain result of his rashness, he eagerly mounted the shrouds and boldly walked out upon the main yard-arm; where pausing, and clinging by a single rope above his head, he looked down a moment from the dizzy height upon his vessel's deck far below, and then turned his gaze toward the open country visible from his elevated station, soliloquizing in a voice of fierce triumph, while he marked not that a figure stealthily followed him up the mast, hastily concealing itself behind the sail.

"The end is near, the race of the slave-ship of Sicily is well nigh run! Yonder from the yard-arm I can see the mansion of the Sicilian vice-governor, which full soon now I shall rifle of the fair star of Sicily, the governor's pretty daughter, who is well fitted to grace an emperor's nuptial couch! The czar of all the Russias this night loses his trusty servant, and the beautiful Beatrice finds a husband in the slave-captain of the Mediterranean. The profits of this last living cargo swells my wealth to a round million in solid gold pieces, and now I shall claim my bride of the governor Ceriti; who has sworn, the covetous old miser, that never shall his peerless daughter marry a man whose wealth does not measure a thousand dollars, a thousand times told! Ha, ha! but the old fool's avarice suits well my purpose; for else the young captain of her father's argosy, the accursed Henrique Hernano, who has stolen the young girl's foolish little heart, would carry off the prize—but my handsome rival is poor, and can never produce the wealth the good father-in-law, that is to be, craves!"

Then hoarsely muttering with the exultant tones of a demon, "I go now to crown my plot! But ho, ho!" and he uttered a horrid laugh, "I shall return again this night, when my scheme is accomplished, to blow up the slave-ship with every soul on board, and thus destroy every

trace of my guilt! Little dream my unsuspicious crew that a mine of gunpowder is laid in their captain's cabin, ready at a second's warning to explode the magazine and precipitate them all to death!"

And with the derisive laughter upon his lips, the determined Sampsona swung his form recklessly from the yard-arm of his lugger, and descended through the air to the summit of the cliff a few feet below. With hasty strides his course lay onward and inward, toward the distant town, and soon the walls of Sicily's citadel had enclosed the person of the slaver chief.

"Ha, ha! others laugh too! Now we will see who laughs last!" uttered in stern, subdued tones an invincible voice, soon as Sampsona's form had passed beyond sight and hearing.

The same instant a dark form rose up from the concealment of a loose sail, the same stealthy figure we have seen so cautiously ascending the shrouds after the departing Sampsona; and instead of descending the rattlings, swung itself by a hanging rope so silently and noiselessly to the deck, that his return had been as unnoticed by any as had been his previous departure. But while in the act of descending, the mysterious figure, in which now stood revealed the proportions of the mate Michaelo, might possibly have been heard to mutter with no less exultation than his captain had displayed:

"So, he thus contemplates, by the wholesale murder of his crew, to annihilate the partners and proofs of his guilt! 'Tis fortunate that I followed, and overheard his plot, or all might have been lost! Ah! and peradventure deeply am I concerned in it—more deeply than any other. Now to baffle his schemes, and compass my long-cherished ends! This Sampsona has met his match! He soon shall be surprised with the knowledge that Michaelo the mate is not what the mate Michaelo seems!"

No sooner had the mysterious speaker reached the quarter-deck, than he walked forward and addressed the startled crew:

"My men, up anchor and stand out for an offing. Barricade, away."

The crew of the slave-ship eyed each other aghast. This command from their lieutenant confounded them, after the orders left by the chief on departing.

"But, Senor Michaelo, the captain ordered us to heave anchor and lay by here?" returned the oldest of the surprised seamen at length.

"I know it—Captain Sampsona is a traitor and a scoundrel!" rejoined Michaelo, boldly; "he has plotted this night to leave you for ever and blow up the ship about your ears!"

"The proof! the proof!" shouted the excited crew.

"Go find it—in the captain's cabin! You will discover a train of gunpowder laid to the magazine!"

The crew made a precipitate rush at the horrifying announcement of their mate, but quickly returned from the cabin with dismay upon their faces, tumultuously exclaiming:

"The accursed traitor! We are satisfied! death to the villain! Michaelo is our chief!"

"Then obey your new captain's orders!" commanded the late mate, sternly, and exulting in his triumph, watched eagerly their execution.

"Full soon Sampsona shall learn the secret reason why Michaelo but a week since sought a mate's berth in his ship, in place of the officer whom during the slaver's pause at Elba I watched my opportunity to slay in single combat to which I wantonly provoked him, and thus made room for myself and plans. My own counterplot is now ripe for execution, and shortly now shall come to a head. My little argosy is near!"

And outward, as thus the mysterious speaker spoke, into the blue open Mediterranean glided the slave-ship of the Sicilies.

A strange character dwelt in the Sicilian capital, none other than the vice-governor of the island province, the Signor Cariti. Common repute made him the wealthiest man in the Italian dependencies; his real estate comprised half the land and the houses in the Sicilies, and his coffers were said to contain a treasure, in amount exceeding a million of money. But no good use seemed he to make of his riches, for he bore the reputation of a miser among the Sicilians, and had himself publicly declared, that not the best man in Italy, though prince or noble, whose worldly wealth was not equal to a round million, should ever be the husband of his daughter Beatrice, whose surpassing beauty made her known as the "Star of the Sicilies."

Without ceremony we shall take the curious reader to the interior of the miser governor's habitation, the splendid executive mansion of the island, and maugre the formality of asking pardon for our intrusion of the hospitable and somewhat choleric Signor Cariti, steal a view of the old man and his beautiful daughter as they sit together on the open balcony. There is a disdainful pout on Beatrice's pretty lip, and her dark southern eye is frequently turned with love's solicitude toward the beautiful blue sea which is heaving tranquilly to the reflection of the bright moonlit skies, for the night luminaries are out in all their glory, and the flashing firmament is as light almost as the sunny heavens of the day.

"Beatrice, my dear, what are you looking for?" coolly demanded the old man, as he marked her earnest glance—"Il Signor Capitano Sampsona will be here soon; don't be in a hurry."

The sweet girl's lip curled instantly into a pout of angry displeasure, and with some tartness in her soft musical tones, she scornfully rejoined:

"I shan't distress myself on his account, father, I assure you! I was not thinking of him in the least," she added, with a sarcastic toss of her head.

"It's the other captain, then, I presume," the miser coolly rejoined; "il Capitano Hernano, the young commander of my argosy? You may as well dismiss all thoughts of him for a husband," continued the old man, sternly; "for, did he *live*," added he, with emphasis, "the moneyless mariner should never wed my daughter."

"*Live?* what mean you by those words? O father, tell me quick!" cried the beautiful Sicilian, at those portentous words, with a wild scream bounding to his side, "O father, he is not dead?"

"Undoubtedly, my child, that is the report," responded the governor, indifferently; "he was missed from his argosy at an island

where he had cast anchor for a while on his return; and it is believed fell in an encounter with the slaver, Captain Sampsona, who I have learned was upon the island at the time, and doubtless sought a quarrel with his rival in your affections; indeed, the dead body was the next morning found upon the shore, pierced through and through with rapier thrusts!"

"O, if he had safely brought his argosy to port, with its priceless cargo of jewels, and precious stones, and golden ore, from the mines of remote Peru, then would that one voyage have made *him* worth the million, and *me* his bride! O, my dear Henrique! and I loved him so!" And the hapless girl fell senseless to the floor, in her innocence and beauty a picture that would have moved anything human, save a miser's heart of adamantine rock.

Coolly, however, the money-fiend beheld his gentle daughter faint, and unmoved bent over his unconscious child, and was about carelessly to raise her in his arms, and bear her into the mansion, when suddenly an abrupt hand was laid upon his arm, and in mingled surprise, alarm and anger, the old man turned to confront the intruder, as a deep voice said:

"Signor Cariti! Sampsona the slaver has returned from the last voyage which makes him a millionaire, and now is come to claim his bride."

"Then take her, Signor Capitano, she is yours!" said the stony-hearted miser, and he placed the beautiful girl's unconscious form in the slaver's arms.

"Liars both? Villains all!" a fierce, bold voice exclaimed, and a noble youth's manly form sprang over the balcony, and snatched her senseless form from the slaver's grasp.

"Il Capitano Hernano?" exclaimed the governor.

"What is this! Michaelo my mate!" at the same instant in breathless amaze Sampsona's astounded tongue uttered.

"Beatrice, Beatrice, awake from thy swoon! 'Tis your lover implores!" the stranger cried, in the ear of the helpless girl, whose precious form he held wildly to his heart.

Mysterious sympathy! love's sweet accents seemed to have pierced to her swooning senses, for responsive to the imprisoned call, the beautiful girl the next moment returned her lover's ardent embrace, and passionately sought each other's lips.

"Alive? O my Henrique! art yet alive?" wildly Beatrice cried; "I thought thee for ever lost to love and me!"

"Still your lover lives, Beatrice. Not beneath my accursed rival's weapon did I fall, as I heard your father tell you; the dead body found by the authorities was the corpse of the slaver's mate, whom I myself slew that I might secure his place to circumvent this villain here."

As the lover spoke, ere the exasperated Sampsona could find space for reply, a deep, unearthly noise, a booming sound afar o'er the sea and shore, a dread rocking, like the shock of an earthquake, broke upon their startled ears.

"Etna has exploded! 'tis an eruption of the volcano!" yelled the terrified miser and Sampsona, overcome by the sudden horror.

"False! 'tis neither Etna nor Vesuvius!" exclaimed Hernano, in a

clear, proud voice. "Sampsona, scoundrel! it is the slave-ship of the Sicilies. Yes, infernal slaver!" he fiercely added, "the lugger with all her crew is blown into eternity! to the magazine communicated the slow match which a half hour since I lighted, on leaving the slaver to hasten hither and defeat your villanous ends. Senor Vice-Governor, this villain is now a penniless beggar; for his fortune of a million is destroyed to the last maravedi by this premature destruction of his ship. Thus I punish your life of crimes."

And quick as the words that left his lips, the young man seized the startled Sampsona, and before he could have a chance for resistance hurled him over the balcony. The doomed man grasped madly with the fierce instinct of life at the empty air through which he passed down his headlong descent, but the body rebounded from the rocks below, and the next instant plunged a lifeless corpse into the blue waters of the sea, which was crimsoned by the life-blood of the wretch.

"Bianca! Signor! my argosy is anchored beneath the balcony;" exclaimed the noble avenger instantly—"my lovely argosy, with her kingdom's wealth of gold and diamonds. Henrique Hernano is richer now than the Grand Duke of Italy."

Swift wings has Madam Rumour; and bright and early the succeeding morning the city rang to the glad tune that the noble and well loved Captain Hernano was to be the husband of the beautiful Beatrice, the star of Sicily; for destroyed was the slave-ship, and safely into port had sailed the precious Sicilian argosy.

THE "SPEEDWELL."

At the time to which this sketch refers, the flag of St. George floated from every lofty point in and about Boston, and the immediate period was that just previous to the outbreak of actual and open hostilities between the colonies and the mother country—a period of time crowded with incident and interest, and the records of which would be too numerous for faithful preservation.

The port of Boston, though not yet declared to be in a state of blockade, was but little better; for its inhabitants, who endeavoured to import merchandize or provisions, even coastwise, were subjected to such exorbitant charges and duties, under a tariff established and enforced by the local authorities of the British crown, that almost every luxury and many of the necessities of life became contraband goods, from the fact that no one could afford to import them and pay the port charges.

This state of affairs gave rise to the fitting out of three or four small vessels by the inhabitants, of about a hundred and twenty or thirty tons burthen, ostensibly as fishermen, but in reality as smugglers. They were well manned and found in every respect, and could, if need be, defend themselves when attacked by the king's cutters, if

under such circumstances as to render such a course the best policy consistent with the owner's interests. In spite of the efforts of the revenue officers, there was one of those crafts that made her regular voyages, and introduced a large amount of goods upon which the custom-house could levy no duty, or indeed discover at all.

As we have said, there was one of these skimmers of the sea that had particularly drawn down upon herself the anathemas of the revenue officers, by the wonderful manner in which she always escaped them; and, indeed, no one of them could actually say that he had ever really seen her at all. Some talked of a Mediterranean rigged craft, while others designated her as a rakish fore-and-after, while a third was equally certain that she sailed with three masts. But at any rate, all agreed that there was a little fly-away, as they called her, of most singular character for speed and cunning, which must be leagued with Old Nick himself.

It was a New England sunset hour, and the big red luminary, as it was sinking behind the horizon, gilded the piles of transparent clouds in the western sky with silver and golden colours of every hue. The green islands that dotted Boston harbour looked doubly verdant at this sunset hour, while the waters of the bay were rippled with here and there a sober coasting craft that sought anchorage on its breast.

In the south-eastern board there had been gradually growing larger and larger a neat, trim craft of some two hundred tons burthen, and as she reached within a mile of the Brewsters, near the Lower Light, it was evident that she was a king's cutter, and in chase of a clipper-built craft of about half her own size. While the former crowded all sail, the latter showed but a part of her canvas, but yet kept easily the relative distance between them.

The lesser craft was a kind of three-masted schooner, being rigged on her fore and main-masts like an ordinary topsail schooner, but having a mizzenmast stepped in her quarter-deck that carried a spanker and gaff topsail. Her hull was low and dark, giving her the appearance of less size than she actually registered, being painted black, relieved just below the channels with a streak of white and red, while a couple of painted ports were visible on either side, represented as open, but which on closer inspection proved to be for ornament only.

This exquisitely-moulded little craft skimmed along the surface of the water like a sea-gull, wearing only a jib, with her fore and main-sail; though the cunning eye of a sailor would have noticed the ready manner in which her spanker and gaff were brailed to the mizzenmast, while precaution might be read, too, in the loosely arranged but well handled topsails.

On sped both vessels by the Brewsters and up the channel-way lying between Hull and what is now Fort George's Island. When directly opposite the latter island, the smuggler, for such she really was, tacked boldly to the southwest through the little narrow gut that intersects Hull and Baker's Island, and shooting through this passage with wind and water in her favour, she rounded to under the lee of Baker's Island, and instantly let go her anchor.

As the sun set the wind gradually grew lighter, and the king's

cutter came up with less speed, and indeed but crept along now, while the tide, already at its full, began gradually to turn once more seaward. By the time the cutter reached the mouth of the gut, the back-flowing waters began to set through this well-known rapid-flowing piece of channel-way at far too strong a rate for her to attempt its passage with the moderate wind that was blowing. So nothing was left but for her to bear up for the city, hoping to intersect the smuggler as she came up towards the main channel, or else to double the island on the other end, and get in the inner side and capture her.

The commander of the cutter knew very well that the chase could not pass again to sea except by the passage through which she had entered this land-locked portion of the bay; and leaving a well-armed boat's crew at this point to intercept the smugglers if they attempted this passage, he held on towards the town. It must take the cutter a good half hour to round the western point of the island against the tide—a fact which the smuggler's people knew very well, and they governed themselves accordingly.

With the most surprising despatch the mizzenmast of the smuggler, which seemed as firm as any spar on board, was at once unshipped and carefully housed on deck. The flying jib-boom was run inboard, and its hamper and sail unbent and stowed below; the light and graceful yards were unrove and sent down, and the two tapering topmasts followed, and were snugly stowed on deck. Suddenly, at a word of command, a canvas covering which had been neatly fitted to the hull of the symmetrical craft, was drawn inboard over the bulwark, leaving the low dark hull relieved only by a single strip of white. One more change, and all was complete. The tag-boat that had been towing at the taff-rail during the chase was hoisted on board, and inverted so as to cover a long tom, the only gun on board the schooner, and she was completely metamorphosed.

The hands on board of the Witch of the Wave—for such was the name that appeared upon the canvas covering of the stern, but which now bore in plain letters, "The Speedwell"—were no strangers to this sort of business, or they could never have effected it in the almost incredibly short space of time in which it was accomplished. The anchor was hoisted, mainsail and jib set, and just as the smugglers were doubling the island, they passed a couple of cables' length to leeward of the cutter, whose captain, leaping into the shrouds with a trumpet in his hand, hailed them, "schooner, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir."—"What schooner is that?"

"The Speedwell, of Boston."—"What's your freight?"

"Been out these ten days fishing."

"Seen anything of a three-masted schooner inside here?" continued the captain of the cutter.—"No, sir."

"The two vessels were fast separating, and the "Speedwell" bore up towards the town, quietly hoisting her foresail when out of sight of the cutter, which was soon lost among the islands looking after the three-masted schooner.

That night there were many "sweethearts and wives" regaled with the luxuries brought them in *The Witch of the Wave.*

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